

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDICAL EXAMINER'S ROLE IN SUBSTANCE USE DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

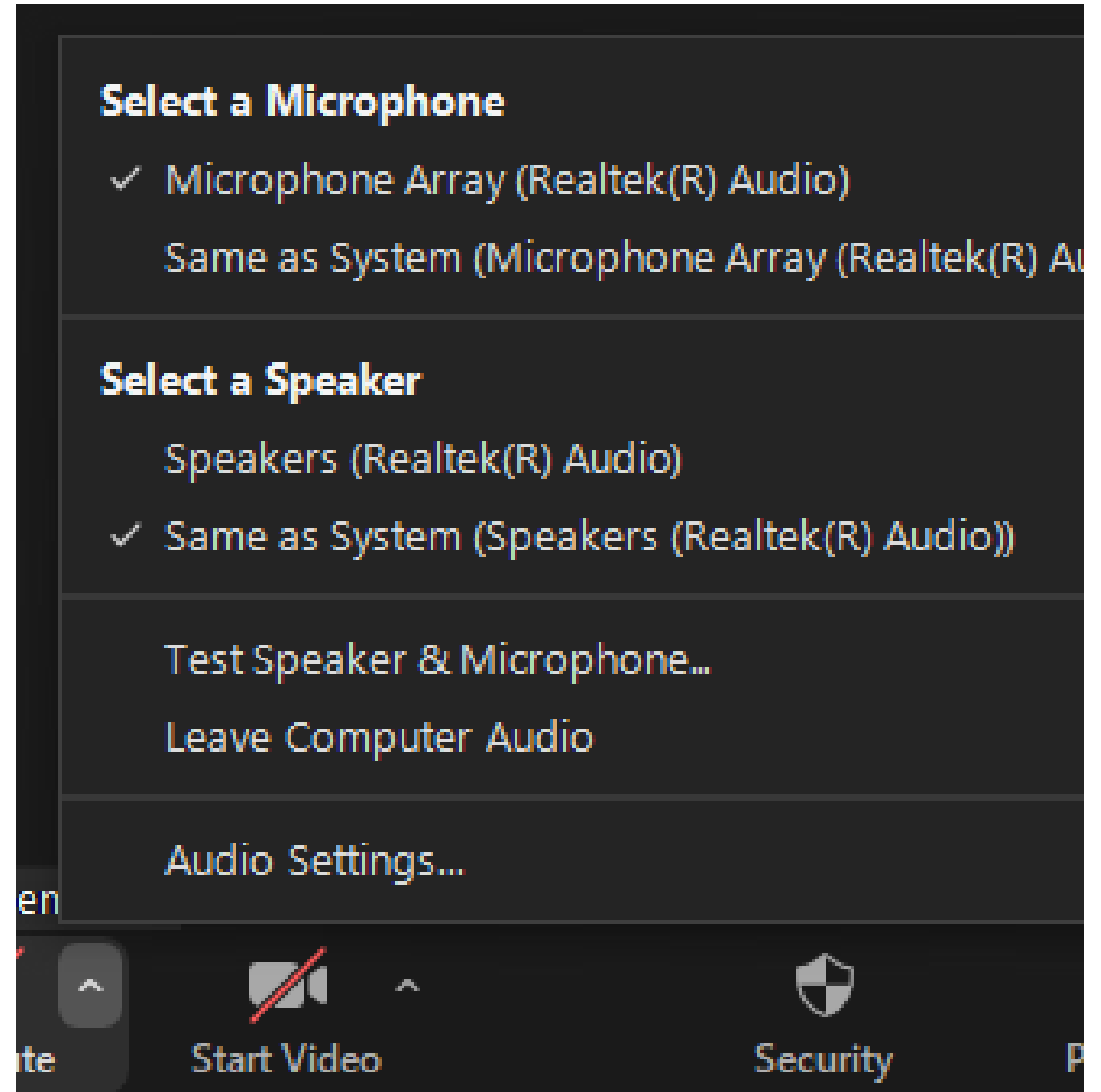
Hospital Systems Addiction Care Community of Practice

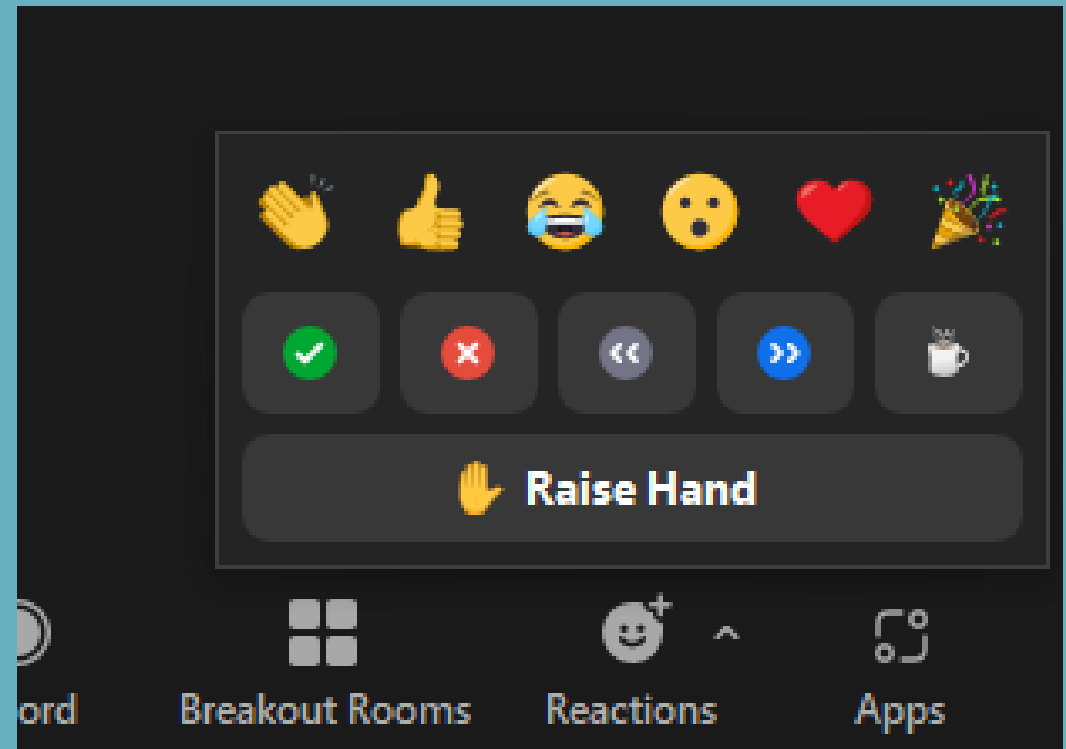
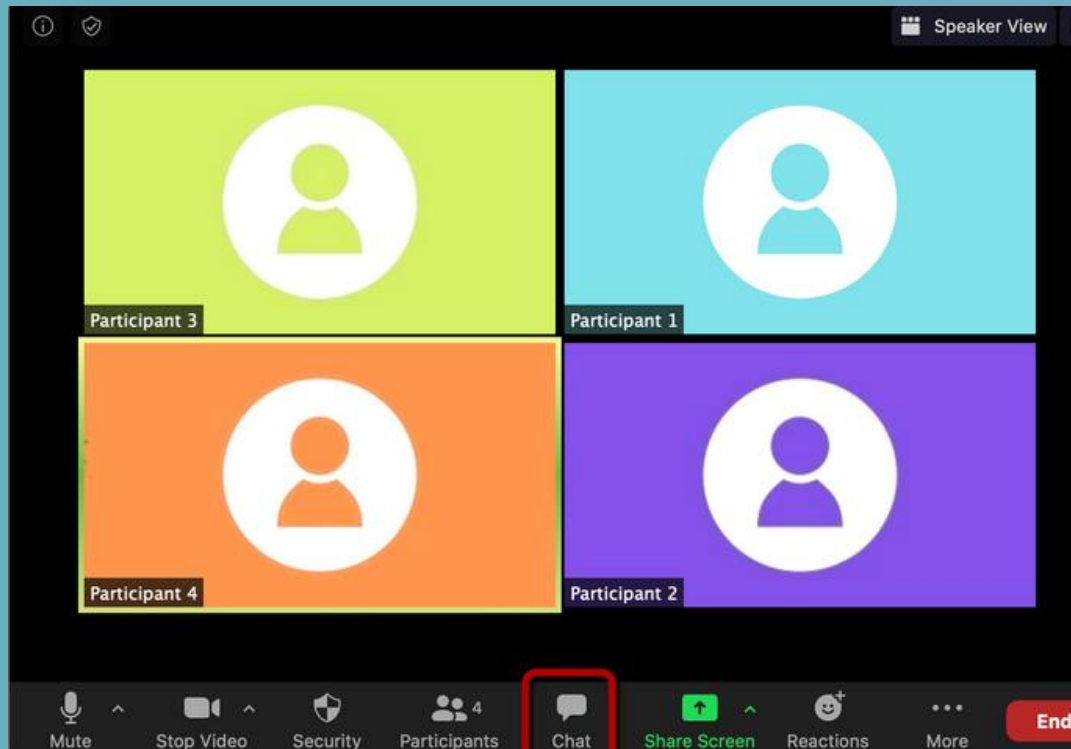
October 16th, 2025, 12:00-1:00 PM

Sponsored and Facilitated by:



Housekeeping





Zoom Engagement Tools



Objectives

Participants will understand:

- How the Medical Examiner's Office investigates deaths associated with drugs.
- The process used by the Medical Examiner to determine that the cause of death is drug related.



Kim Fallon, M.S.

Former Chief Forensic Investigator,
New Hampshire Office of Chief
Medical Examiner

Medical Examiner's Role in Substance Use Deaths

Kim Fallon

NH Chief Forensic Investigator—retired

Objectives

- Understand how death investigations are conducted in NH
- Understand the NH Office of Chief Medical Examiner
- Understand how forensic pathologists determine cause of death

Office of Chief Medical Examiner

- Founded in November 1986
- Department of Justice
- Scene Investigators – Assistant Deputy Medical Examiners
- ADMEs were independent contractors until late December 2023

OCME

- Dr. Jennie Duval, Chief Medical Examiner
- Dr. Mitchell Weinberg, Deputy Chief
- Dr. Abigail Alexander, Associate Medical Examiner
- Chief Forensic Investigator
- Deputy Chief Forensic Investigator
- Evidence Technician
- 2 Administrative Assistants
- 10 full-time Assistant Deputy Medical Examiners
- 2 part-time Assistant Deputy Medical Examiners

National Association of Medical Examiners

- Standards for how many autopsies an FP can do each year
- 250-300 autopsies per FP per year
- Can lose accreditation if standards are not followed

Forensic Pathologists

- NH has ME system, not coroner
- Most suspected drug deaths should be autopsied
- Nationwide shortage of FPs
- NH got 3rd FP in August 2024

Role of OCME

- Investigate “untimely deaths”
- Establish cause and manner of deaths
- Release remains to family in a timely manner

RSA 611-B:11

A medical examiner shall make investigations in medicolegal cases.

A medicolegal case exists when death is pronounced or remains are found indicating that a human has died and death is known or suspected to have resulted from:

- 25 different categories of death
- Automatically an ME case: accident, suicide, homicide
- Other categories include threat to public health, deaths occurring in legal custody, toxic exposure

REDISTRIBUTION OF SCENE
PICTURES IS PROHIBITED

History

- Female in her 40s with h/o IV drug use
- Found in the driver's seat in her car on the side of the road
- Had vomited
- ? Drug paraphernalia in the car

























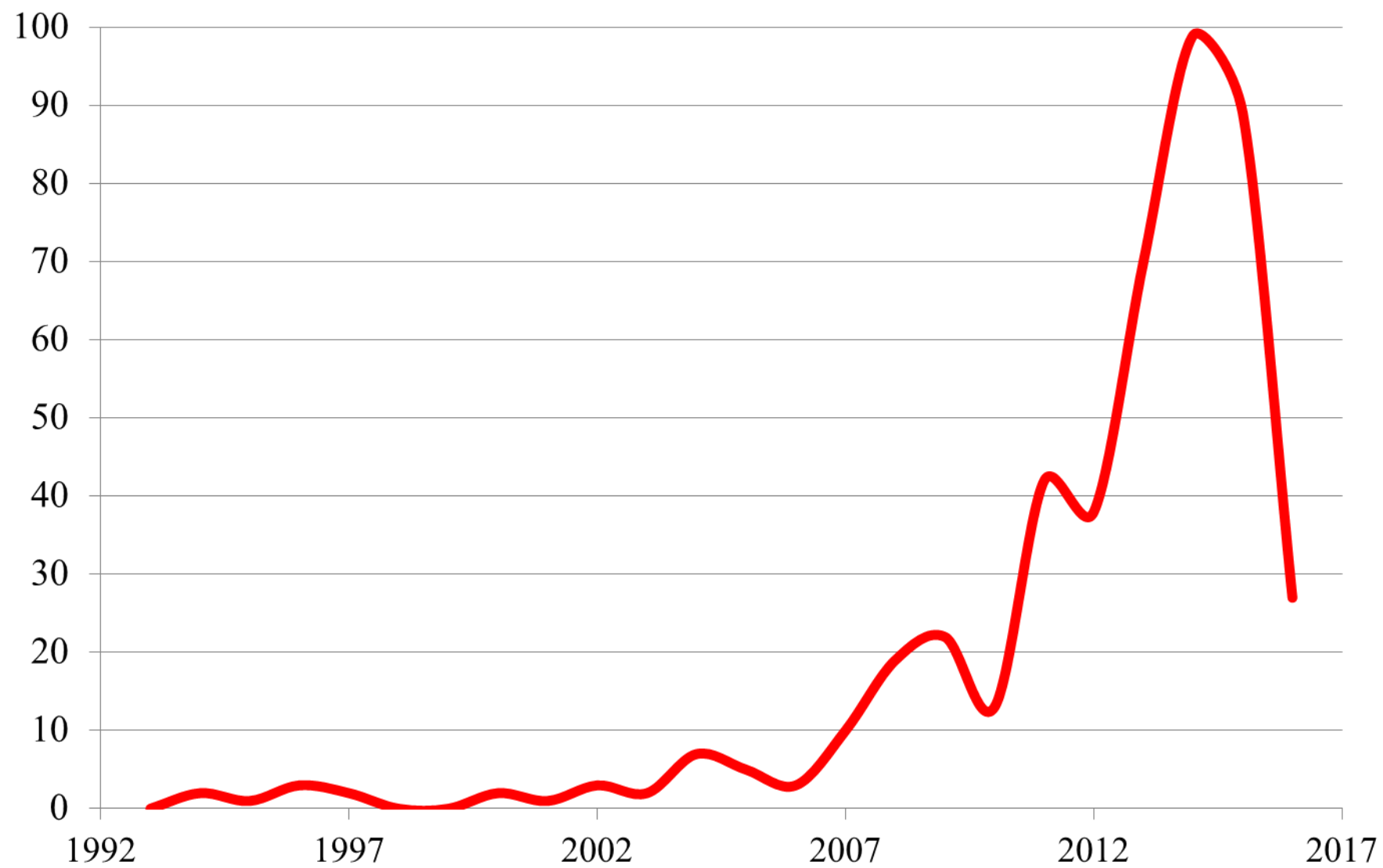




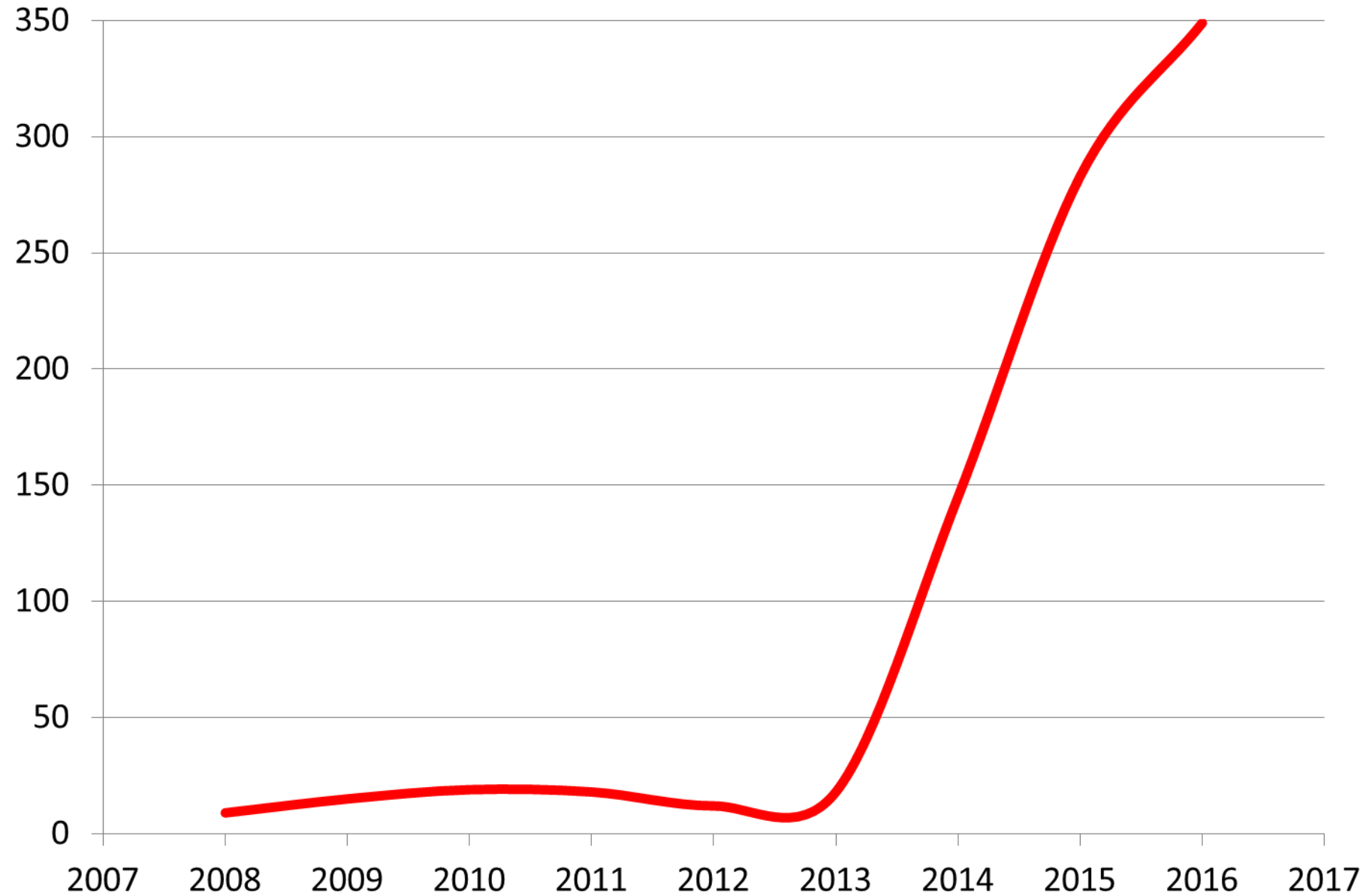




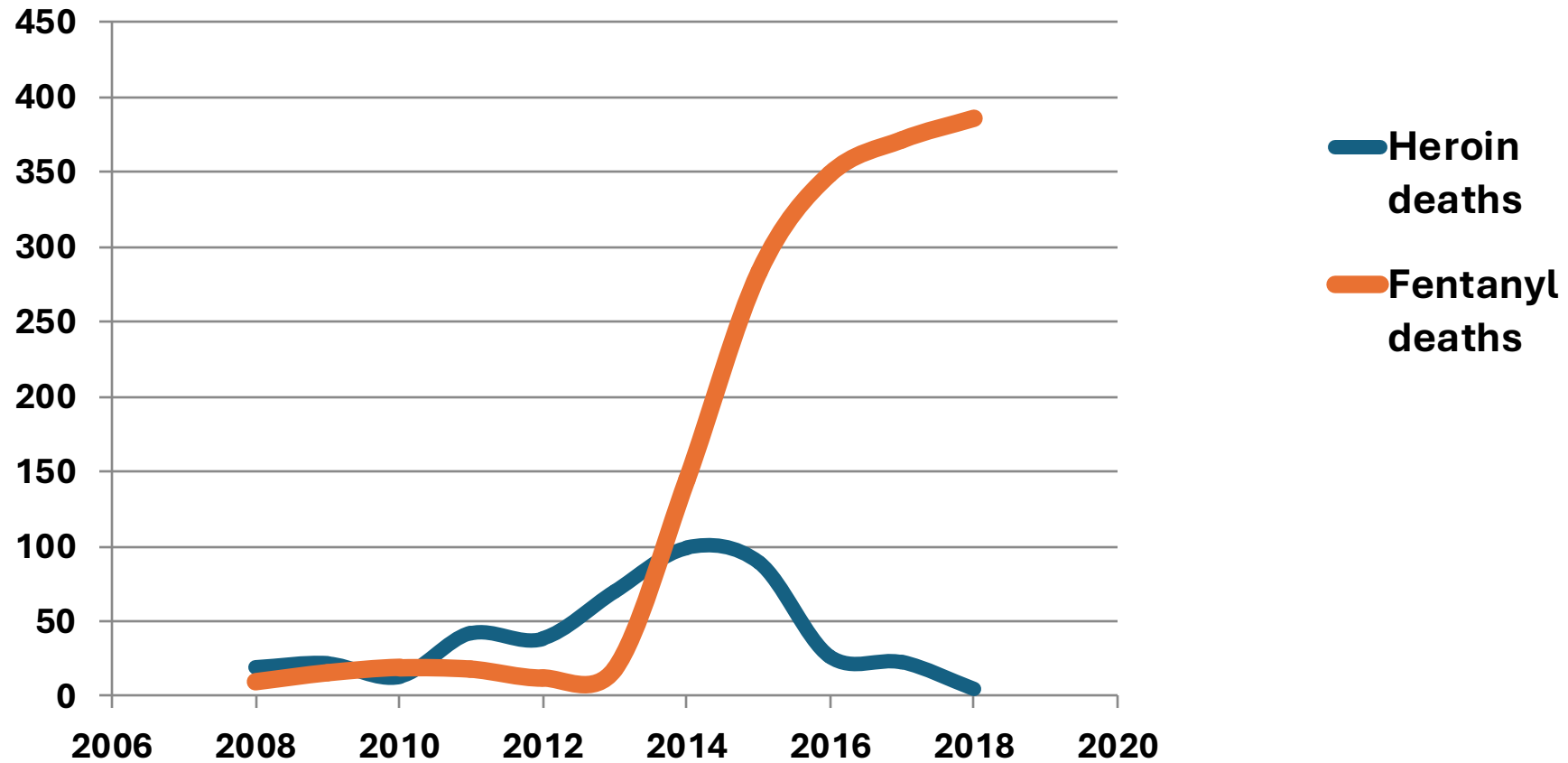
New Hampshire Heroin Deaths



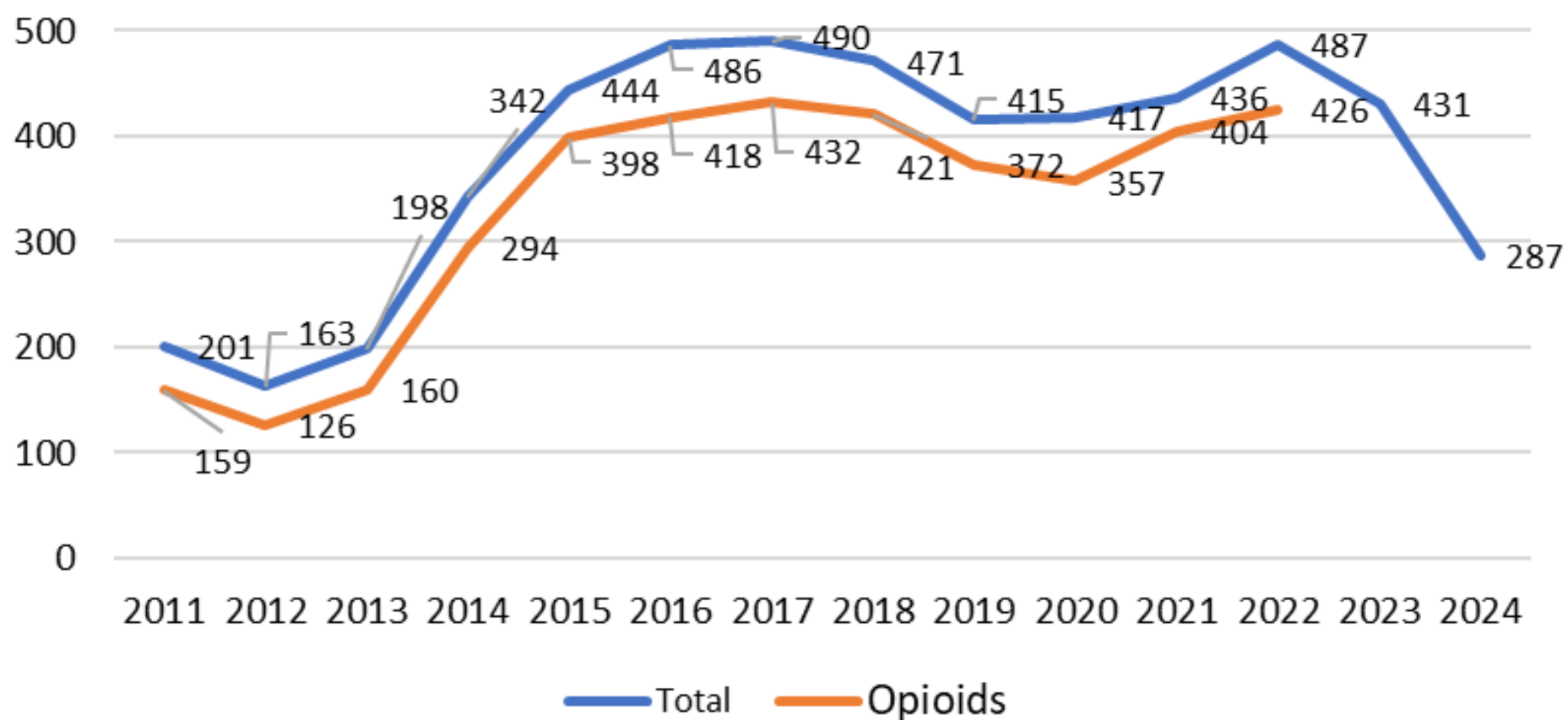
New Hampshire Fentanyl Deaths



Heroin and Fentanyl Deaths in New Hampshire



NH Overdose Deaths by Year



Fentanyl Blood Levels

Route	Dose	Peak Plasma (µg/L)
Transdermal	25-100 ug/hr	0.3-3.8
Oral	800 ug	1.4-3.0
IV	2 ug/kg	11

Baselt 2017

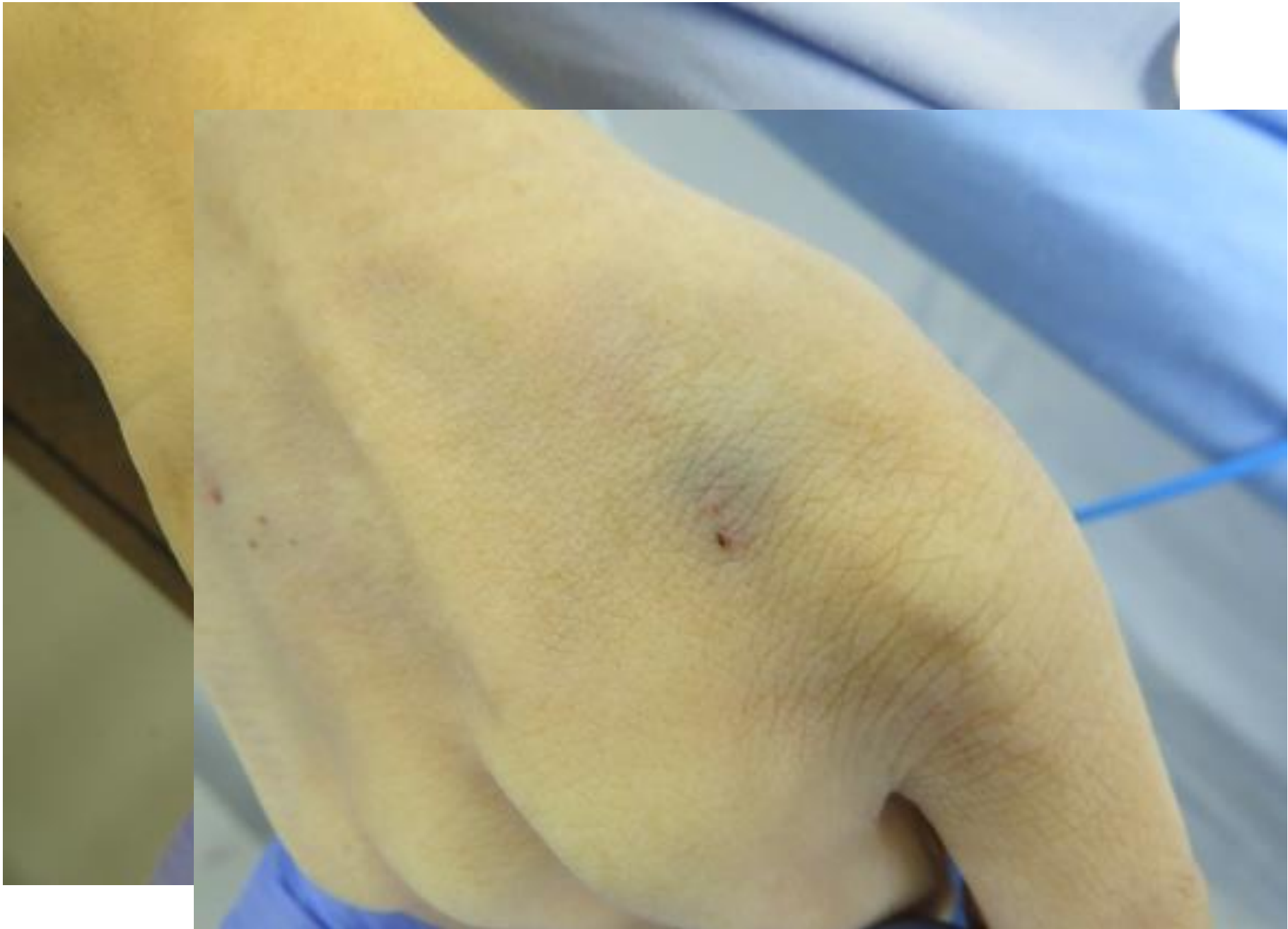
Therapeutic/ Nontoxic	Toxic	Lethal
0.3-10	3-20	3-210

Molina 2010

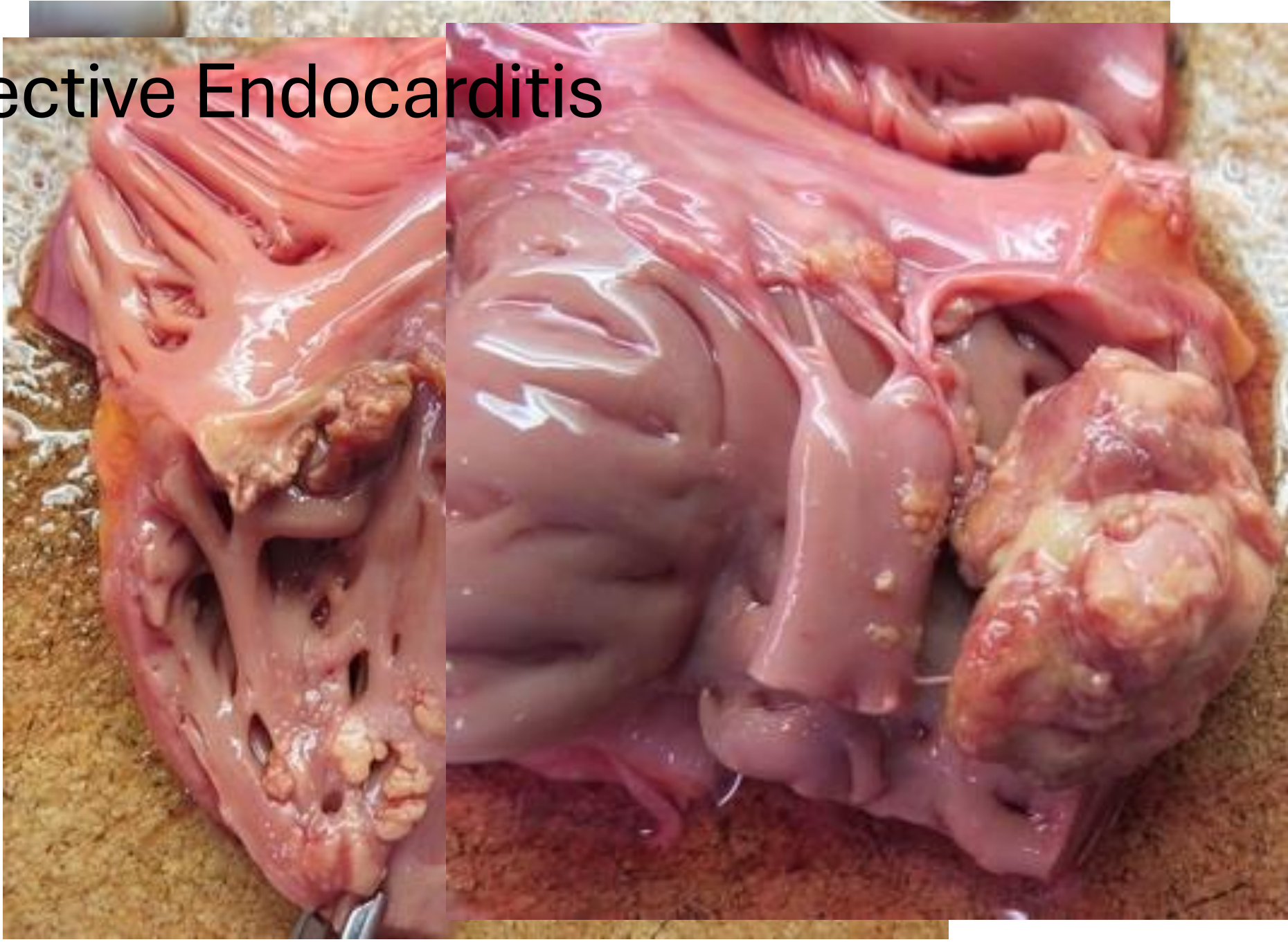
History

- Homeless female in her late 20s with h/o IV heroin use
- Brought to ED for lethargy, difficulty breathing, and mental status changes
- Coded in ED





Infective Endocarditis



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**We are here to help you
improve outcomes.**

NHTAC provides technical assistance to practitioners, communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders that work across the alcohol and other drug continuum of care.

Thank You!

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Please help us continue to improve your CoP experience by completing an evaluation at this link or by scanning the QR code:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HSAC101625>



CoP Evaluation