

Anesthetized heroin withdrawal: no benefit

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Researchers say they've determined the use of general anesthesia for heroin detoxification offers no benefit when compared with other methods.

In addition, the scientists said the use of anesthesia for detoxification is associated with several potentially life-threatening adverse events.

The researchers, led by Dr. Eric Collins of Columbia University, said many of the approximately 1 million heroin-dependent individuals in the United States fear the physical discomfort of withdrawal and either avoid treatment or leave it prematurely.

Such problems have given rise to ultra-rapid, or anesthesia-assisted opioid detoxification, which involves administering an opioid antagonist to neutralize the effects of heroin while the patient is unconscious from general anesthesia.

Although publicized as a fast, painless way to withdraw from heroin, the treatment is expensive -- costing as much as \$15,000 -- and lacks good evidence to support efficacy, the scientists wrote.

The study appears in the Aug. 24 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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