There Is No Proof that Mandatory Rehab Helps Addicts

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The *Wall Street Journal* reported December 14 on a proposal by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker to mandate the involuntary 72-hour detention of opioid overdose survivors rescued by first responders. This is another example of feel-good public policy that strains resources and personnel, arguably infringes the civil liberties and due process rights of those detained, and won't work as intended.

Lashing out with new approaches that are not empirical or data-driven will not fix the problem.

While mandatory rehab has been employed in the criminal justice system for years, the rationale for this has not been evidence-based. A systematic review of over 400 studies on the subject published in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* in 2016 concluded, "Evidence does not, on the whole, suggest improved outcomes related to compulsory treatment approaches, with some studies suggesting potential harms."

Furthermore, while the precise length of time needed for successful rehab is uncertain, 3 days is barely enough time to go through acute withdrawal. Even if the 3 days are used to plug the patient into Medication-Assisted Treatment, significant numbers of MAT patients eventually drop out of these programs. Self-motivation and self-regulation play significant roles in successful rehab.

The alarm and frustration of policymakers addressing the overdose crisis are understandable and justifiable. But lashing out with new approaches that are not empirical or data-driven will not fix the problem and may make matters worse.

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