Prescription Drug Misuse in the UK

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Funding and Conflicts of Interest

Euro-DEN and Euro-DEN Plus

- 2013-2015: The Euro-DEN project had financial support from the DPIP/ISEC Programme of the European Union
- 2015 onwards: The Euro-DEN Plus Project has received support from EMCDDA since August 2015

Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Control Center

- Grants and statistical assistance with analysis of data from UK Internet surveys and web monitoring surveys
- Honorarium to attend and present at annual RADARS scientific meetings and international pre-symposium

Why 1.6m Britons are addicted to prescription pills

The ‘safe’ painkiller that is turning unsuspecting women into drug addicts

- Co-codamil, a painkiller containing paracetamol and codeine
- Over the past decade, the number of prescriptions for it has doubled
- The majority of addicts are women, but men are not immune

A nation of prescription drug addicts: More Britons die from abusing painkillers and tranquillisers than heroin and cocaine

- Many GPs ‘prescribe drugs to addicted patients’
- A counterfeit market has lethal consequences
- Crackdown on appetite suppressants urged

Type of drug: The most prevalent diverted drugs are opioids and benzodiazepines, increasing amounts of gabapentin and pregabalin are being diverted. Cognitive enhancers could be susceptible to diversion in the future. Further attention needs to be given to the misuse of codeine in over-the-counter (OTC) preparations as a precursor to the misuse of prescription opioids.
UK population level data: prescription painkiller misuse

- From 2014/15 CSEW survey following question included:
  "Have you taken prescription-only painkillers not prescribed to you, which you took only for the feeling or experience it gave you"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any Drug</th>
<th>Painkillers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 to 59 years old</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 24 years old</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 59 years old</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life-time NPM misuse: 19.3%
**UK NMRUx survey established in 2012**

"used without a doctor’s prescription or for any reason other than what was recommended by your doctor"

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**Prevalence of last 12-month in Q4 2018 non-medical use of prescription and over the counter (OTC) opioids**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Any opioid</th>
<th>OTC opioid</th>
<th>Strong opioid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Conclusions**

The NMRUx survey has a broad reach of participants, and a sampling scheme that achieves external validity, compared with general population demographics. NMRUx’s online format allows flexibility in items surveyed and in response to emerging trends.
Summary

Loperamide is a new opioid receptor agonist that is available as an over the counter anti-diarrhoeal agent in the US and UK. Recent mortality data in the US have shown an increased mortality of opioid overdose deaths (119.5% increase) associated with loperamide use. Little data exists on the prevalence of loperamide NMU.

Aims: The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of loperamide NMU in the UK and US and to describe the characteristics of these fatal loperamide cases.

Design: The Researcheridal, Addictive, Venomous and Addiction Related Surveillance (RAVENS®) Survey of Nonmedical Use of Loperamide in the UK and the US.

Methods: A total of 1452 and 4110 participant surveys were included. Data from the UK and data from the US, obtained from questionnaires, were collected from medical and general practitioners. Participants were asked questions about medical and nonmedical use of loperamide, frequency of use and reasons for use, route of use problematic drug use, and drug misadministration.

Results: Prevalence of lifetime loperamide use was 0.6% in the US and 0.7% in the UK. Loperamide use was associated with higher risk of use of problematic drug use in the past year, and cannabis use in the past year. Loperamide use was more common in the UK than in the US.

Conclusion: NMU of Loperamide is common. In the current international environment of opioid antagonists, awareness of the NMU of loperamide is important.

Life-time NMU: UK 0.66%, USA 5.19%

UK population level data: prescription painkiller misuse

- Association with illicit drug use
  - Used in last year 10.7% vs not used 5.9%
- Demographic factors associated with increased use
  - Most deprived 8.3% vs least deprived 4.4%
  - Rural 6.2% vs Urban 6.4%
  - Employed 6.2% vs Unemployed 7.2%
  - Long-term illness / disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prescription painkillers</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any illicit drug</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prescription drug misuse and chronic pain

2018: 32 centres in 22 European/neighbouring countries
Parting Thoughts

- Increasing evidence of non-medical use of prescription medicines in the UK
  - Predominately opioids and benzodiazepines
- Misuse appears associated with chronic illness and pain, lower income and social deprivation
- Significant harms being associated with misuse
  - Drug treatment, drug-related deaths, ED presentations
- Understanding relationship between prescribing patterns will enable improved harm reduction strategies
  - Alternative strategies to managing pain
  - Warning patients and clinicians of the risks of NMU

Thank You