



FOCUS ON RESEARCH

Community Pharmacy Services for Drug Misusers: Measuring National Service Delivery and the Development of Attitudes and Practice over Two Decades

Researchers

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Aims

The survey aimed to describe and explore current findings and compare with data from 1995, 2000 and 2006 on:

- pharmacists' attitudes towards drug misusers and pharmacy services for drug misusers;
- service provision and their relationships to attitudes;
- prescribing and dispensing patterns in drug misuse;
- misuse of over the counter medicines;
- training experience and needs.
- the impact of the New Drug Strategy on prescribing patterns;
- and the level of pharmacist prescriber activity in the management of drug misuse.

Project Outline/Methodology

Questionnaires were posted to the 'Lead Pharmacist' in all Scottish community pharmacies (n=1246). The questionnaire was as used previously with new questions added to reflect recent changes. It covered: attitudes, services provided (needle exchange, dispensing methadone and buprenorphine and supervision of these drugs), past training and future training needs. New developments covered whether the Drugs Strategy had any impact on prescribing since 2008, pharmacist prescribing and involvement in the naloxone programme. Two postal reminders were sent then a final telephone call directly asked key questions if a questionnaire was not able to be completed.

Key Results

There was a 70% (n=873) response for key variables but 57% (n=709) to the full questionnaire that covered attitudes as well as practice.

There has been an overall increase in pharmacies providing a needle exchange service. 155 (17.8%) respondents provided this for 5424 'regular' clients (mean per pharmacy: 12.5 in 1995, 20.3 in 2000 and 37.7 in 2006 and 35.0 in 2014). 92.4% (n=804) of respondents dispense drugs for drug misuse, 88.5% (n=773) dispense methadone to 16511 individuals (mean per pharmacy 7.3 in 1995, 13.1 in 2000, 20.1

in 2006 and 21.4 in 2014); of these, 94.4% provide methadone supervision. 52.7% (n=460) dispense buprenorphine to 1777 patients. Regression analysis over the four time points found that, pharmacists' attitudes towards drug misuse services were significantly more positive in 2014 and this influenced their involvement in dispensing and providing a needle exchange service.

Suspected misuse of over the counter drugs increased and codeine-containing analgesics are ranked higher in 2014 than antihistamine sleep aids (highest in previous years).

Although 82 (9.4%) pharmacists were qualified prescribers, only 9 actively prescribed for drug misuse. A third of pharmacists (n=296) had dispensed naloxone (for opiate overdose). Just over 10% (n=74) of pharmacists have noticed an impact on prescribing patterns since the new Drug Strategy. Most notable was 'more take home doses' and 'more reducing doses' for methadone. Training in drug misuse remain high at 78.6% and 47.6% for blood borne diseases training but more engagement with other services was needed.

Conclusions

Pharmacists' have positive attitudes towards drug misuse services which is reflected in their increased dispensing of drugs for drug misusers, supervised consumption of drugs on pharmacy premises and needle exchange services.

What does this study add to the field?

This study documents the high involvement of pharmacy in managing drug misuse and the importance of training on attitudes and practice.

Implications for Practice or Policy

Involvement in new initiatives such as naloxone and prescribing is currently low but there is scope to develop these further. Pharmacy should be brought more closely into the integrated team.

Where to next?

Greater involvement in prescribing and the naloxone programme.

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