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Changes in trends and pattern of strong opioid prescribing in primary care (Article)

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Abstract

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Background This study evaluated the prescribing trends of four commonly prescribed strong opioids in primary care and explored utilization in non-cancer and cancer users. **Methods** This cross-sectional study was conducted from 2000 to 2010 using the UK Clinical Practice Research Datalink. Prescriptions of buprenorphine, fentanyl, morphine and oxycodone issued to adult patients were included in this study. Opioid prescriptions issued after patients had cancer medical codes were defined as cancer-related use; otherwise, they were considered non-cancer use. Annual number of prescriptions and patients, defined daily dose (DDD)/1000 inhabitants/day and oral morphine equivalent (OMEQ) dose were measured in repeat cross-sectional estimates. **Results** In total, there were 2,672,022 prescriptions (87.8% for non-cancer) of strong opioids for 178,692 users (59.9% female, 83.9% non-cancer, mean age 67.1±17.0 years) during the study period. The mean annual (DDD)/1000 inhabitants/day was higher in the non-cancer group than in the cancer group for all four opioids; morphine (0.73±0.28 vs. 0.12±0.04), fentanyl (0.46±0.29 vs. 0.06±0.24), oxycodone (0.24±0.19 vs. 0.038±0.028) and buprenorphine (0.23±0.15 vs. 0.008±0.006). The highest proportion of patients were prescribed low opioid doses (OMEQ≤50-mg/day) in both non-cancer (50.3%) and cancer (39.9%) groups, followed by the dose ranks of 51-100-mg/day (26.2% vs. 28.7%), 101-200-mg/day (15.1% vs. 19.2%) and >200-mg/day (8.25% vs. 12.1%). **Conclusions** There has been a huge increase in strong opioid prescribing in the United Kingdom, with the majority of prescriptions for non-cancer pain. Morphine was the most frequently prescribed, but the utilization of oxycodone, buprenorphine and fentanyl increased markedly over time. © 2014 The Authors. European Journal of Pain published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of European Pain Federation - EFIC.

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EMTREE drug terms:

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narcotic analgesic agent oxycodone

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Primary Health Care Young Adult

Chemicals and CAS Registry Numbers:

buprenorphine, 52485-79-7, 53152-21-9; fentanyl, 437-38-7; morphine, 52-26-6, 57-27-2; oxycodone, 124-90-3, 76-42-6;

Analgesics, Opioid; Buprenorphine; Fentanyl; Morphine; Oxycodone

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