

How many people are receiving Methadone Hydrochloride mixture for opiate dependence in Scotland and what are the prescribing costs per person?

There is no national routine information which reports the number of people in Scotland who are receiving Methadone Hydrochloride mixture, nor information on the cost per person to the NHS. This report describes a study carried out with the aim of calculating these indicators, to enhance understanding of drug misuse treatment in Scotland.

The most recent available estimates indicate that there are around 51,582 people in Scotland who are problematic users of opiates and/or benzodiazepines⁽¹⁾. In 2003/4 12,600 new clients were reported to the Scottish Drug Misuse Database as beginning treatment for a drug related problem ⁽²⁾ and the majority were opiate users. Methadone Hydrochloride mixture is a (opioid) drug commonly used in the management of opioid dependence in Scotland. In 2003/4 294,904,358 mls of Methadone Hydrochloride mixture were dispensed at a cost to the NHS of £11,675,767.

The Prescribing Information System (PIS) at Information Services (ISD Scotland), NHS National Services Scotland holds information derived from prescriptions dispensed in the community in Scotland. The system and information held constitute a key part of the pharmacy payment process. However, the PIS does not store patient identifiable information (e.g. name, date of birth, address) that can be used to count the number of people receiving particular medications. To overcome this limitation, information was extracted manually for a two month sample (June and July 2003) from all the prescriptions dispensed in the community for methadone mixture (approximately 65,000) and entered into a bespoke database.

To estimate the number of individuals receiving methadone for addiction, a process was undertaken whereby multiple prescriptions for single individuals were identified. The first initial of the clients' first and surnames, their gender, their street name, and the dispenser code (representing the pharmacy where the mixture was dispensed) were extracted. This combination of parameters offered sufficient basis for identifying prescriptions for single individuals, whilst observing good practice for handling person identifiable data. In this way it was possible to estimate the number of people receiving methadone mixture in Scotland during 2003 (n = 18,017).

It was possible to extrapolate from the 2003 information to provide estimates for 2002 and 2004, using other information available from the prescriptions (i.e. the average daily dose and the total amount dispensed).

The formula applied was:

The number of clients =
$$\frac{\text{total amount of methadone prescribed}}{\text{average daily dosage X average number of prescription days in the sample period}}$$

Key findings

Using these methods the following mid-year estimates for 2002, 2003 and 2004 have been produced (Figure1).

Figure 1: estimated number of methadone clients in June-July 2002, 2003 and 2004

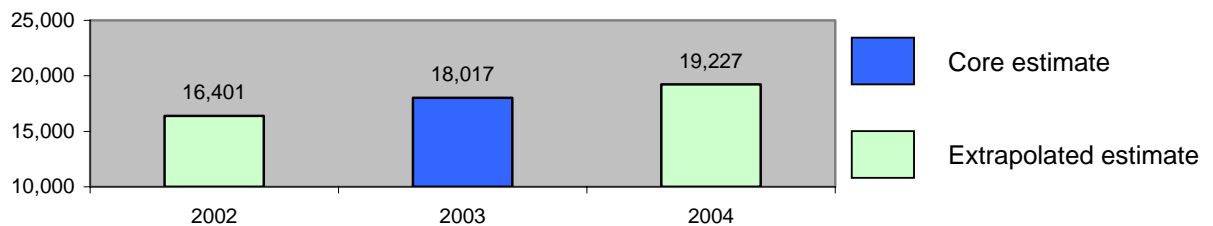


Table 1 gives a breakdown of the number of individuals receiving methadone, by NHS Board area.

Table 1: Estimated number of individuals receiving methadone by NHS Board area; 2002, 2003 and 2004

NHS Board	2002²	2003¹	2004²
Argyll and Clyde	1 568	1 645	2 000
Ayrshire and Arran	1 026	1 295	1 215
Borders	56	61	77
Dumfries and Galloway	269	384	402
Fife	858	833	897
Forth Valley	284	361	572
Grampian	1 413	1 403	1 591
Greater Glasgow	6 133	6 569	6 623
Highland	110	154	212
Lanarkshire	1 294	1 438	1 348
Lothian	2 191	2 559	3 104
Orkney	0	0	0
Shetland	32	27	25
Tayside	1 166	1 289	1 161
Western Isles	0	0	0
Scotland	16 401	18 017	19 227

¹ Core estimates

² Extrapolated estimates

Once the number of individuals receiving Methadone Hydrochloride mixture is known the average cost per client per year can be calculated. Using the most recent 2003/4 PIS cost information it is estimated that the average cost per patient per year, in 2003, was £609. This estimate includes only the cost of the medication and dispensing, and not any clinical costs.

These estimates show that the number of people receiving prescriptions for Methadone Hydrochloride mixture as a treatment for drug dependence in Scotland increased over the three-year period. Around one third of the estimated total number of opiate users in Scotland are receiving methadone treatment.

References

- (1) Hay G. Gannon M. Mckeganey N. Hutchinson S & Goldberg D. 2004. [Estimating the national and local prevalence of problem drug misuse in Scotland](#)
- (2) [Drug Misuse Statistics Scotland 2004 – ISD Scotland](#)