
PATTERNS OF DRUG MISUSE ON GUERNSEY, BRITISH CHANNEL ISLANDS

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Introduction: Guernsey is a British Protectorate island (population 65000) in the English Channel. Illicit drugs are difficult to import and expensive people look to alternative substances.

Objectives: To establish patterns of drug misuse among patients referred for treatment.

Methods: Case note audit of all referred patients in 2011, cross referenced with sudden unexpected death case review results.

Results: 198 patients were referred, 80 (40%) for mainly drug dependency. Reported patterns of use tended to follow local availability and poly-drug misuse was common. Of the drugs clients, 96% reported misusing prescription only medicines (POMs) and over the counter (OTC) drugs, particularly opiates and benzodiazepines. Buprenorphine products were most commonly misused (26%), followed by benzodiazepines (25%), dihydrocodeine (22%), heroin (11%) and codeine (6%) (more than 1 drug may be reported so totals <100%). A high risk sub-group (9%) injecting fentanyl (derived from fentanyl patches) was identified. On the island in 2011 there were several fentanyl-related deaths at post mortem case review.

Conclusions:

High rates of pharmaceutical drug misuse on Guernsey may reflect the low availability of illicit drugs like heroin and cocaine. This increases demand for addictive POMs and OTCs. Prescribers in isolated communities need to be more cautious when prescribing addictive POMs, particularly fentanyl. Pharmacists may also need to monitor for OTC drug misuse, particularly of codeine-containing medications.