

Introduction

People receiving opiate substitution therapy (OST) for opiate dependence are often in treatment for years. Eastwood *et al* (2018), using NDTMS data, found 5 different trajectories that heroin users followed in the first 5 years of treatment, but the data used in their study is self-report of 3 month periods. This study uses contemporaneous data of OST medication doses and urine drug screens to estimate progress

Method

Luton Drug Service (LDS) is a community based service treating Luton residents with drug problems. The clinical diagnosis of almost all patients is the opiate dependence syndrome (ICD-10 code F11.2). They receive OST, psychosocial intervention and recovery activities such as assistance with accommodation and occupation/employment. Around 500 patients are in treatment at any one time. LDS provides contractually mandated data to the Luton Clinical Commissioning Group about successful discharges from treatment.

In this study, the preparation for patients coming to see an addiction psychiatrist involved collecting longitudinal data on dose of OST medication and drug screens.

As the data was collected in the course of routine clinical practice, the Trust Senior Research Fellow advised that the approval of the Trust Research Ethical Committee was not required.

Findings

The data of 164 patients were collected

Components of Patterns Observed

OST doses

Phases: Increasing phase, decreasing phase, interrupted phase, repeated interrupted phase (chaotic behaviour)

Dose Level change: static, ascending, descending, bounce

Urine Drug Screens

Continuing use, continuing clean samples, intermittent

These components are useful for monitoring short passages of treatment, but are not illustrated here

Patterns of Progress Identified

Immediate stabilisation followed by detoxification is demonstrated in Figure 1.

A patient who continues to use on top of his script, whatever the dose, over an 11 –year period, is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Progress in treatment is not linear, as shown in Figure 3, where a period of stability is followed by a period of chaotic behaviour

Where change occurs, from using to non-using, it is abrupt, not gradual, as indicated in Figure 4.

The data of a patient who showed chaotic behaviour throughout treatment is shown in Figure 5. This pattern continued for 20 years

(only 10 years shown here) before the patient went abruptly into recovery

Discussion

These observations suggests that progress in OST is not necessarily linear (ie it does not always follow a pattern of stabilisation, detoxification and abstinence), and may not occur at all. When change does happen, it is abrupt. The patient does not have to be stable to go into recovery. These data make it possible to postulate that addiction may not be a psychological condition but an abnormal mental state

Reference

Eastwood B, Strang J, Marsden J. (2018) Continuous opioid substitution treatment over five years: Heroin use trajectories and outcomes. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, in press ([https://www.drugandalcoholdependence.com/article/S0376-8716\(18\)30265-5/fulltext](https://www.drugandalcoholdependence.com/article/S0376-8716(18)30265-5/fulltext), accessed 17 May 2018)

Declaration

I declare that no conflict of interest exists

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ms Debbie Liverpool, Mr Rehan Tariq, Dr Paula Waddingham and Dr David Vickers for support, advice and guidance in this study.

Current contact details: Dr R Cohen, ResoLUTIONS, CGL, 12 Victoria Street, Luton LU1 2UA (robert.cohen@cgl.org.uk)

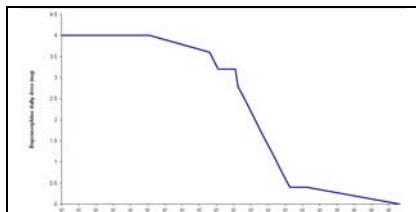


Figure 1: Pattern of a patient stabilising immediately on OST and reducing to 0

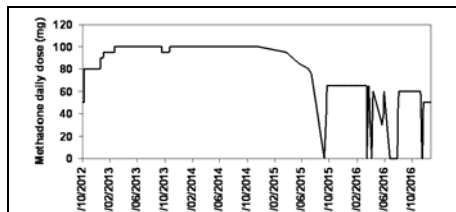


Figure 3: Pattern of a patient who had a period of stability followed by a period of chaotic behaviour

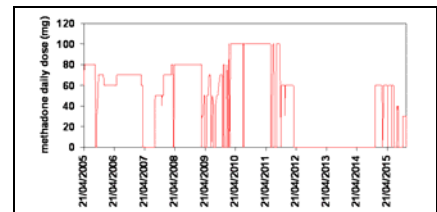


Figure 5: This patient showed a chaotic pattern of progress before abruptly going into recovery

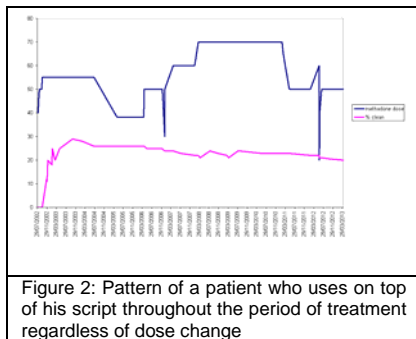


Figure 2: Pattern of a patient who uses on top of his script throughout the period of treatment regardless of dose change

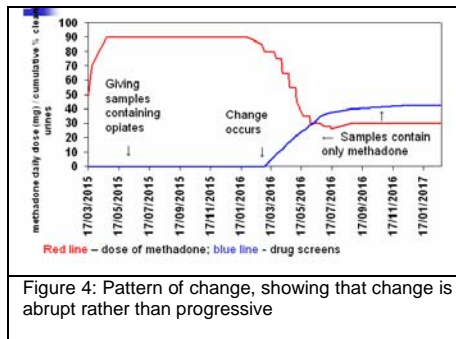


Figure 4: Pattern of change, showing that change is abrupt rather than progressive