

Symptomatic Relief of Opioid Withdrawal

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Introduction

Patients with opioid dependence syndrome often struggle to self-manage the physical withdrawal symptoms and associated psychological distress without resorting to illicit opioid use. Although staff are aware of available over-the-counter remedies, we needed a consistent way of communicating advice in a form that patients could understand and retain.

Aims

We aim to improve the experience of patients on or awaiting Opioid Substitution Therapy. We also aim to improve staff confidence in advising such patients, and to reduce emergency presentations to other services of patients suffering opioid withdrawal symptoms.

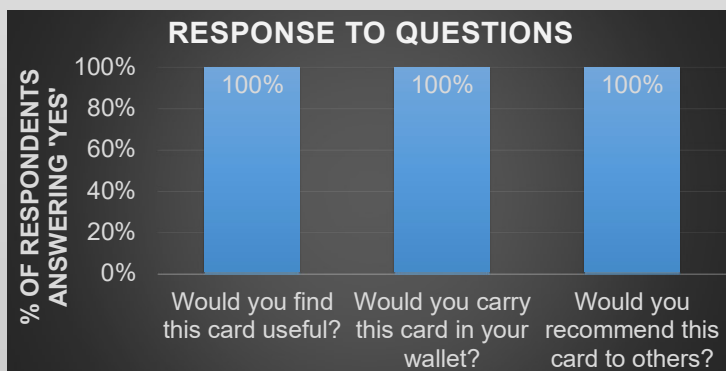
Methodology

We designed a card identifying the physical symptoms of opioid withdrawal and suggesting over-the-counter medications to relieve each symptom. Information explaining opioid withdrawal was provided on the reverse side of the card.

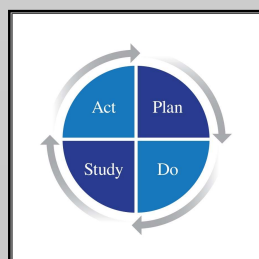
The card was shown to 10 patients, who were then asked would they find the card useful; would they carry it in their wallet; would they recommend it to others. Suggestions for any changes were invited.

Results



All 10 patients answered "yes" to all 3 questions. One suggestion was made: that the card should recommend where medication could be bought most cheaply. Based on this suggestion, we amended the card to advise that patients buy generic medication where possible.



"Can you recommend where these medications can be bought most cheaply?"



Card (front and reverse)

Diarrhoea Loperamide (Imodium)	Dehydration Dioralyte
 Opioid withdrawal symptoms 	
Stomach cramps Hyoscine Butylbromide (Buscopan) or Mebeverine	Muscle pains/ headaches Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen

Opioid withdrawal

Opioid withdrawal is rarely dangerous.

It can however be very unpleasant, especially if you have been regularly using high doses of opioids for a long time.

There are some easy steps you can take to relieve the symptoms you may encounter if you are in opioid withdrawal. These are given on the reverse side of this card.

Buy generic medication rather than the brand name (for example Loperamide rather than Imodium or Ibuprofen rather than Nurofen). This will be cheaper and it is the same medication.

Although these medications will be suitable for most people, it is important that you always read the label and check with a pharmacist before taking any medication. Always take medication as instructed and never exceed the maximum recommended dose.

Conclusion

Patient feedback suggests that this card will help patients to self-manage the discomfort of opioid withdrawal. Our next steps will be to include a colour-printed and laminated version in our induction packs for patients coming into treatment. Following this we plan to disseminate the card to other services such as mental health liaison, general psychiatry, emergency departments and acute medicine. In the future we hope to translate the card into other languages, as well as printing it in a more durable, "credit card" format.

Acknowledgements

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