

ARE ABUSE DETERRENT FORMULATIONS EFFECTIVE IN REDUCING OPIOID-RELATED HARMS?

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Introduction/Issues: The past twenty years has seen dramatic increases in the utilisation of pharmaceutical opioids in Australia, particularly in the use of high potency opioids. In parallel, indicators of opioid diversion, extra-medical use, and harm have also increased. Industry has made substantial investment in the development and marketing of a range of potentially abuse-deterrent formulations (ADFs). Drawing on international literature and Australian data, this paper asks: Are ADFs effective in reducing opioid-related harms?

Methods/Approach: This paper summarises my work in this area, and discusses two ADFs as case studies. A range of data and analyses are presented, including opioid sales, a prospective cohort study, annual surveys of people who inject drugs (PWID), and administrative health datasets. This paper examines impacts at population-level and among high-risk populations of people who inject drugs (PWID).

Key findings: Introducing these two ADFs had clear impacts among PWID in Australia: i.e., reduced injection of these formulations and no clear evidence of displacement of drug use. Yet there was little evidence of impacts at the population level.

Discussion and conclusions: ADFs may make tampering with opioids more difficult, but will have limited impacts in addressing overprescribing, overuse and opioid harms when taken via the intended route.

Implications for policy: This research highlights the necessity of assessing effectiveness of ADFs against multiple outcomes using various study designs, data sources and populations. Prescribers, regulators and policy-makers need to remain mindful that ADFs are only one aspect of a broader multi-faceted response needed to curb problematic opioid use and harm.

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