

Client and staff knowledge and perspectives of opioid agonist treatment and client driving safety

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Introduction: Opioid agonist treatment (OAT) is effective in managing opioid use disorder, but concerns persist regarding its long-term impact on driving ability. This study investigates the knowledge and perspectives of OAT driving safety among OAT clients and healthcare staff, and to identify key concerns and facilitators to improve driving safety.

Method: Cross-sectional survey of clients and staff at 15 public OAT clinics in New South Wales, Australia, examining agreement with statements regarding driving rights, restrictions, and assessment of OAT clients' driving fitness. Concerns and suggestions to improve client driving safety were canvassed. Data analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-Square, and thematic analysis.

Results: Most participants (N=548; 88.0% clients, 12.0% staff) agreed that clients should have equal access to a driving licence as anyone else (80.1% clients, 72.7% staff) and OAT clients should not drive if using an impairing substance (81.5% clients, 86.4% staff). Clients were more confident in assessing their driving ability (90.0%), while staff expressed significantly lower confidence assessing client driving fitness (42.4%; p<0.001).

Clients were less agreeable that they should only drive when their OAT dose is stable (80.1%, staff 92.4%; p=0.008). Concerns noted by staff and clients around driving safety included sedation and impairment, particularly from unstable doses, while suggestion to improve client driving safety included education/awareness, testing/monitoring, and stricter restrictions.

Discussions and Conclusions: Generally, staff and client responses align with guidance around driving whilst on OAT. Clients appear more confident in self-assessing their driving fitness, while staff do not feel confident assessing clients' driving fitness. Driving restrictions may be a barrier to OAT entry; further research is required.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Staff training can improve assessment of driving ability and encourage discussion of driving safety with clients. Strategies such as objective assessments or follow-ups may contribute to safer roads and the well-being of OAT clients.

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