

Long-acting injectable buprenorphine: A qualitative study of consumers' experiences of care in Australia

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Introduction / Issues OR Introduction and Aims: Long-acting injectable depot buprenorphine represents an important new treatment option for opioid dependence. However, consumers' experiences of depot buprenorphine treatment remain under-researched. Beyond recent clinical trials, this Australian qualitative study explores consumers' expectations, concerns, and experiences, of depot buprenorphine treatment.

Method / Approach OR Design and Methods: A total of 30 participants (16 men, 14 women; mean age 47.3 years) from Victoria and NSW participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participants had histories of heroin and/or prescription opioid use, and opioid agonist therapies (e.g., daily dosing buprenorphine/methadone). Common themes were identified using thematic analysis.

Key Findings OR Results: Many participants were optimistic about moving onto depot buprenorphine and being released from previous daily dosing regimens. However, some held concerns about whether depot buprenorphine would 'hold them' for a week/month. The embodied experiences of depot buprenorphine differed (some participants reported feeling the drug under the skin which they monitored over time). Depot buprenorphine itself was experienced as life-changing by some participants; for others, it was part of a wider, network of care (e.g., psychosocial supports), that participants thought was vital to maintain. To manage concerns about depot buprenorphine treatment, participants described varying clinical strategies that were offered by clinicians (e.g., psychoeducation; top-up doses).

Discussions and Conclusions: The ways consumers experience depot buprenorphine treatment and care differs and is context specific. Future care may be improved by regularly checking in with consumers prescribed depot buprenorphine in order to manage expectations and differing embodied experiences of treatment.

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