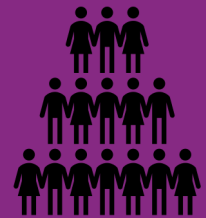


Clients' experiences of long-acting injectable buprenorphine to treat opioid dependence: An Australian qualitative study

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This study aimed to explore Australian clients' experiences of depot buprenorphine treatment for opioid dependence. We asked:

What are clients' expectations of depot buprenorphine, experiences of how it feels within the body, and during dosing cycles over time? How does this impact treatment?

Background

- Long-acting injectable buprenorphine ('depot buprenorphine') delivers a weekly or monthly dose of buprenorphine via subcutaneous injection and is a safe and effective treatment for opioid dependence
- Depot buprenorphine promises to overcome challenges with daily dosing opioid agonist treatment programs, such as stigma experienced when adhering to onerous treatment programs (e.g., daily attendance at pharmacies)
- However, little is known about clients' experiences of depot buprenorphine within the body
- This study explores clients' experiences of depot buprenorphine, paying attention to how the drug feels in the body, and how it fits within wider treatment networks

Methods



- In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 Australian consumers who had been prescribed depot buprenorphine
- Participants were recruited from New South Wales (n=21) and Victoria (n=9)
- Gender: 16 Males (53.3%); 14 Females (46.7%)
- Mean Age: 47.3 years (range 27-66)
- Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically

Further Information



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Findings

Here we present three insights from our analysis with participant quotes:

Expectations about treatment

- Clients often had initial concerns when moving to depot buprenorphine about whether it would work as prescribed ("will it hold me for a month?")

"Moving to depot bupe involved me taking a leap of faith, because you're moving off something which has worked for you [referring to previous pharmacotherapy] and done its job, and you're trying something new!" (Chris*, Male, 62)

Experiences of depot buprenorphine in the body

- Clients' observations about depot buprenorphine in the body varied
- Some could feel it under the skin, others could not
- The meaning derived from varying observations gave rise to different treatment experiences

"First of all, it's like a thicker tube, and then it's like a little spaghetti thing. You can feel it, and there's nothing there. Hopefully, it will last the full four-weeks." (James, Male, 66)

Depot buprenorphine and networks of care

- Being released from previous onerous, daily dosing treatment regimens was experienced by many as emancipatory ("a miracle drug")
- However, depot buprenorphine was often viewed as part of a wider network of care (e.g., where psychosocial supports are important)

"This is a miracle drug to me [...] because it just frees me up to work on myself in other ways." (Hannah, Female, 36)

"You still have to keep your 'safety net' going, you know what I mean? [...] You don't just want to just get on [depot buprenorphine] and then stop all your counselling and all that. That's not the answer. [...] So, you keep your counsellor, keep on going to meetings" (Craig, Male, 51)

*Pseudonyms in use

Summary and Implications for Practice

- Expectations and concerns about whether depot buprenorphine would work as prescribed were often associated with nervousness/anxieties when initiating treatment
- Experiences are not explained by biomedicine alone: rather they emerge through the interaction between expectations, the body, and social circumstances
- Useful for clinicians to 'check in' with clients to understand their personal treatment trajectories and offer supports as desired (e.g., counselling; medication reviews; harm reduction supports)

Complexity of treatment experiences

