What is Oxycodone?

Oxycodone is an opioid analgesic and is most commonly prescribed by doctors to relieve moderate to severe pain. It is a depressant drug which slows the messages travelling between the brain and body. Medical professionals and health care workers are increasingly concerned about the risks of using this drug, particularly those administering it intravenously.

Why was it reformulated?

Since 1st April 2014, ‘Oxycontin®’ (a brand of oxycodone) has been reformulated to make it harder to tamper with for use via unintended routes of administration, such as snorting and injecting with the intention of reducing diversion (refer image on left). The reformulated tablets are resistant to manipulation and tampering, which may lead to acute harms for people who continue to inject this drug.

What is the IDRS?

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) is a national monitoring system which aims to identify emerging trends among ‘people who inject drugs’ (PWID) by monitoring the price, purity and availability of illicit substances, and the associated social and health related consequences. The IDRS enables health and drug trends to be monitored across time and jurisdictions.

Key findings comparing NSW and National data

- In 2014, oxycodone injection was significantly more prevalent (p< 0.05) in NSW when compared with the national average.
- Median number of days of recent oxycodone injection in NSW was 20 days, compared with 10 days nationally, however this is not a statistically significant difference.
- Oxycontin® was reported as the main brand used by the majority of participants in NSW (35%).
- Significantly more (p< 0.05) participants in NSW are reporting oxycodone is ‘more difficult’ to obtain than the previous year.
- Nineteen percent of all participants in NSW report the price of oxycodone has increased in the last six months.
- Participants in NSW are obtaining oxycodone from either ‘friends’ (11%) or ‘street dealers’ (11%).

Key Expert Opinion

- Original Oxycontin® injection/use is becoming less frequent.
- No apparent increase in those seeking treatment since the reformulation.
- Reformulated Oxycontin® presents new challenges for health ‘key experts’ (KE’s) in the management of oxycodone injection/use.
- Overdose remains a primary concern for health care workers particularly when oxycodone is used with benzodiazepines and/or alcohol.
- Many clients are previous heroin users who view oxycodone as a safer alternative.
- According to law industry KE’s, oxycodone remains an inexpensive alternative to other illicit drugs; for example, heroin.

Summary

- Oxycodone injection has remained stable in NSW since 2010.
- Some clients continue to use to reformulated Oxycontin® intravenously.
- Health KE’s are divided as to whether the reformulation of oxycodone has resulted in an increase in use of other drugs.
- The reformulation of Oxycontin® has altered the nature of injecting advice provided by health KE’s.
- NSW IDRS data indicates that oxycodone has become more difficult to obtain.
- The introduction of reformulated Oxycontin® in April 2014 means any long-term benefits in regards to decreasing use and promoting treatment amongst users are not immediately evident.

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Contact

David McKell
National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
University of New South Wales
T: (02) 9385 0407
E: d.mckell@unsw.edu.au