General practice patients treated for substance use problems.
A cross-national surveillance study

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Aims

To describe profile and relative magnitude of general practice population receiving substance use treatment (SUT)
Design-Setting-Participants

Design
Cross-national observational study

Setting
Belgian Network of Sentinel General Practices (SGP)

Participants
All patients 18-64 years receiving SUT at first GP contact from mid-May to mid-Oct 2013 + 7-month follow-up data
The Belgian network of SGP

Representative network of ±150 GP practices reporting structured clinical care data during 1 year-periods

Developed late 70’s to monitor health of population, as
• Most health problems are seen in primary care, also mental health & (chronic) substance use
• GPs: first source of public health information, next to general population
Study’s rationale

Substance use problems is health policy priority, but...
• Non-detection of alcohol abuse by GPs
  → only patients in treatment for SUT
• Regional differences in Belgian health affairs, e.g. Opiate Substitution Therapy (OST)
  → adjusting Flanders versus Wallonia/Brussels

Pilot on top of regular SGP surveillance to examine feasibility of continuous surveillance
Main measurements 1)

Type of substance use
1. Alcohol alone (not 2-4)
2. Prescription drugs (not 3-4), i.e. hypnotics/sedatives or tranquillizers, opioid analgesics
3. Cannabis, stimulants, hallucinogens, cocaine,... (not 4)
4. Heroin or methadone
Main measurements 2)

Treatment status at follow-up (7 months)

1. Drop-out from study/treatment, deceased
2. Discontinued GP treatment, i.e. no GP contact in past 4 weeks
   
   (3-5) Continued GP care, i.e. GP contact in past 4 weeks
3. Usual GP care, SUT by non-GP
4. Cont’d SUT by GP & non-GP
5. Cont’d SUT by GP alone
Population characteristics (N=479)

Region
- Wall/Bxl: 44%
- Flanders: 56%

Gender
- Women: 33%
- Men: 67%

Age
- 25-34: 35%
- 35-44: 20%
- 45-54: 23%
- 55-64: 17%
- <25: 5%
Type of substance use

1) Alcohol alone, 47%
2) Prescription drugs, 20%
3) Cannabis, stimulants, etc., 17%
4) Heroin or methadone, 16%
Type of substance use

- **Alcohol**
  - Belgium: 50% (±5%
  - Flanders: 55% (±5%
  - Wall/Bxl: 45% (±5%

- **Prescription drugs**
  - Belgium: 20% (±5%
  - Flanders: 25% (±5%
  - Wall/Bxl: 30% (±5%

- **Illicit drugs**
  - Belgium: 15% (±5%
  - Flanders: 20% (±5%
  - Wall/Bxl: 25% (±5%

- **Heroin or methadone**
  - Belgium: 10% (±5%
  - Flanders: 15% (±5%
  - Wall/Bxl: 20% (±5%
Substance use characteristics

Results

- First SUT: Belgium 24, Flanders 66, Wall/Bxl 64
- Ongoing SUT: Belgium 66, Flanders 64, Wall/Bxl 64
- Mono use: Belgium 47, Flanders 57, Wall/Bxl 57
- Abstinence: Belgium 57, Flanders 57, Wall/Bxl 57
- ≥10yrs use: Belgium 24, Flanders 66, Wall/Bxl 64
Treatment status at follow-up

- **Drop-out**: 33%
- **Discontinued**: 29%
- **Continued GP care**: 38%

- **Non-GP**: 6%
- **GP & non-GP**: 15%
- **GP alone**: 17%

32% of patients continued GP care (alone or not)
Continued SUT by GP

Results

- Ongoing Episode: 70% yes (n=155), 30% no (n=324)
- Wall/BXL: 60% yes (n=155), 40% no (n=324)
- Alcohol alone: 50% yes (n=155), 50% no (n=324)
- Prescription drugs: 40% yes (n=155), 60% no (n=324)
- Cannabis etc.: 30% yes (n=155), 70% no (n=324)
- Heroin/Methadone: 20% yes (n=155), 80% no (n=324)
Continued SUT by GP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinants Belgian population</th>
<th>OR(95%CI)*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of substance use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol alone</td>
<td>ref</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prescription drugs</td>
<td>1.40(0.81-2.42)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illicit drugs</td>
<td>0.85(0.47-1.51)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heroin or methadone</td>
<td>1.59(0.80-3.16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region Wall-Bxl (vs Flanders)</td>
<td>1.97(1.16-3.34)</td>
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* Adjusted for age (ns), gender (ns) and ongoing vs new treatment episode (ns)
Continued SUT by GP alone

Results
Continued SUT by GP alone

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<td>Alcohol alone</td>
<td>ref</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prescription drugs</td>
<td>4.04(1.65-9.94)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illicit drugs</td>
<td>0.78(0.15-4.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heroin or methadone</td>
<td>6.64(1.76-25.06)</td>
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* Adjusted for age (ns) and gender
Discussion

Main findings
• Majority of general practice patients with SUT have (chronic) problems of alcohol alone
• 1/3 patients cont’d SUT by GP, 1/5 by GP only

Implications
• Adjust for large regional differences in SUT data
• Include GPs in Treatment Demand Indicator (TDI) register?
• Surveillance by SGP will continue
Declaration

No conflicts of interests