

5th of May 2022

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan, TD
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re PQ: 19786/22

To ask the Minister for Health the number of drug users referred to a methadone or similar programme over the past five years; the extent to which the outcome was satisfactory from the point of view of reduction or cessation of dependency on drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Durkan,

The Health Service Executive have been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following table outlines the position:

Methadone and buprenorphine based products are prescription only medications used in Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) for the treatment of Opioid Dependence. The provision of OST continues to be a cornerstone of the response to Opioid Dependence and is a core element of the Harm Reduction approach advocated for in our National Drugs and Alcohol Strategy, 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery'. The prescribing of this medication is controlled under legislation (S.I. No. 522/2017 Misuse of Drugs [Supervision of Prescription and Supply of Methadone and Medicinal Products containing Buprenorphine authorised for Opioid Substitution Treatment] Regulations 2017). As part of this control, all patients commenced on Opioid Substitution are required to be notified to a Central Treatment List operated by the HSE. The following tables outline the numbers treated with OST over the last 5 years, whether they received methadone or buprenorphine, and the numbers of these who were new people in receipt of each medication.

Table 1. Number treated with OST (methadone and buprenorphine) for Problem Opioid Use

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Methadone	10316	10333	10318	10935	10879
Buprenorphine	110	177	262	423	602
Total Number on OST	10426	10510	10580	11358	11481

Table 2. Number of first time patients treated with OST (methadone and Buprenorphine)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Methadone	662	662	563	721	455
Buprenorphine	35	102	179	264	317
Total New People on OST	697	764	742	985	772

In relation to outcomes for these individuals commenced on OST over the last 5 years, this would require a specific piece of research and resources would have to be provided for this to take place. However, since the introduction of OST, there has been a significant longitudinal research study, the ROSIE (Research Outcome Study in Ireland) study. This demonstrated clear evidence that methadone treatment works. This was a national prospective longitudinal drug treatment outcome study and the outcomes from the ROSIE study showed both that drug treatment works and that investment in drug treatment pays dividends. Significant reductions were shown in the key outcome areas of drug use, involvement in crime and injecting drug use. Overall, when followed up over 3 years, the main conclusion was that reductions observed in the proportions using a range of drugs, and in the mean number of days on which drugs were used, between intake and 1-year were sustained at 3-years. In addition, improvements were seen in employment and training. The ROSIE results are comparable with the positive outcomes reported by similar studies in the US (DARP & DATOS) the UK (NTORS) and Australia (ATOS). There is international research evidence that increased length of time in OST is associated with improved treatment outcomes (including reduced use of other opioids and reduced criminal activity) and short-term methadone maintenance treatment is associated with poorer outcomes (Ward J, Mattick RP and Hall W 1998).

Therefore, the HSE remain committed to engaging those with Opioid Dependence onto OST to improve outcomes in terms of reduced drug use, reduced criminality and improved employment opportunities.

Should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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