



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

National Social Inclusion Office  
Primary Care Division  
Health Service Executive  
Mill Lane  
Palmerstown  
Dublin 20  
01 620 1747

13<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin  
Dáil Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ 30578/15**

\* To ask the Minister for Health the number currently availing of a pilot scheme in which participants receive buprenorphin as opposed to methadone; the comparative cost of bought treatments; the comparative risk profile of both medications; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Ó Caoláin,

The Health Service Executive has 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 outlines the position:

As at 31 July, there were 77 people accessing buprenorphine naloxone, the majority of whom were involved in the pilot scheme.

Buprenorphine naloxone is estimated at an additional drug cost of €2,186 (per person per year within HSE Addiction Centres, based on a daily average of 80mls methadone/16mg buprenorphine naloxone).

Opioid dependence increases risk of premature mortality. Opioid substitution therapy with methadone or buprenorphine reduces mortality risk, especially for drug-related overdose. Researchers recently looked to determine whether buprenorphine treatment has a lower mortality risk than methadone treatment for people with opioid dependence in New South Wales, Australia (The Lancet Psychiatry (09/15/15) Kimber, Jo; Larney, Sarah; Hickman, Matthew). According to the researchers, in the first 4 weeks of opioid substitution therapy, buprenorphine reduced mortality risk, but little difference was noted beyond that period.

Phased increased access to buprenorphine naloxone is being considered in the context of 2016 estimates. Progress in this regard will depend on progress in the legislative agenda. The Department of Health has indicated that legislation will not be forthcoming until the end of Q1 2016. This will then be subject to a 3 month EU notification period resulting in a Q2 2016 target date.

I trust this further information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Doyle'.

Joseph Doyle  
National Planning Specialist