



Deaths whilst on pharmaceutical heroin: look-back on the ‘Old British System’

HEROIN ON TRIAL, 31 May 2018

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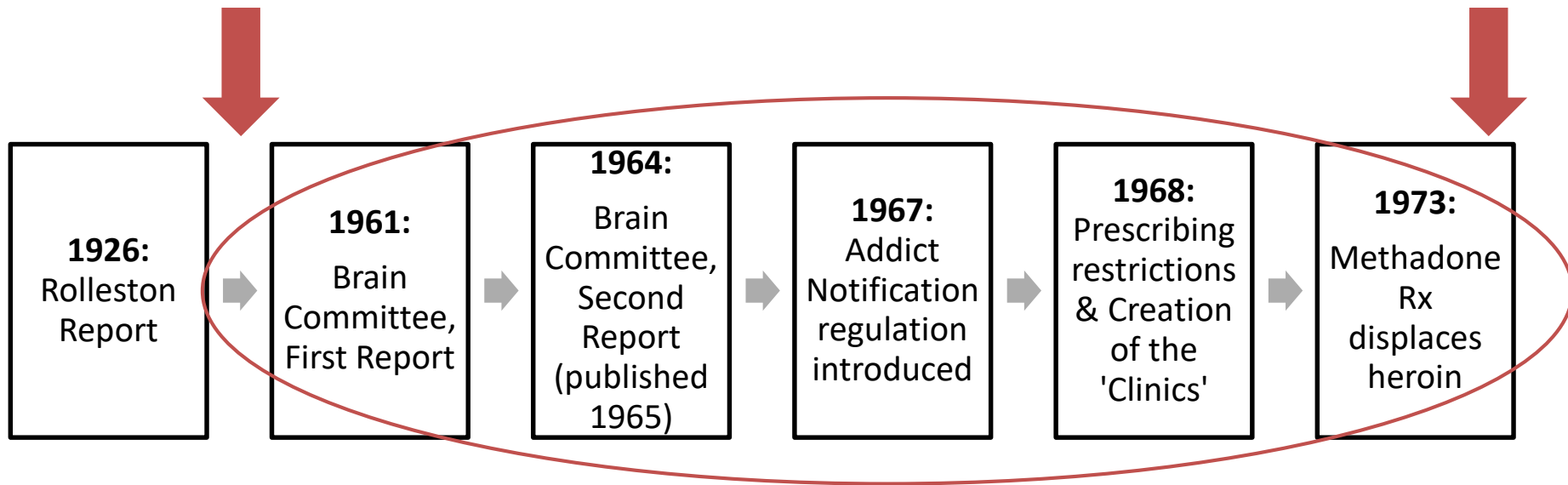
Overview

- Introduction: Why are we interested in historic data?
- Methods: selection of time period and relevant studies
- Results: mortality rates
- Discussion: other similar studies

Why are we interested in historical mortality data?

- Adds to understanding, and to discussion, of use of pharmaceutical heroin for the treatment of addiction
- This was a special time of prescribing practices...
 - ...where relevant data actually exists

Timeline and period of interest



Changes to User Identity

Before the

- Fewer
- Usually
aged, f



middle-

After 195

- New gr
- 1st case



fied in 1960

All Heroin Was Pharmaceutical Heroin

we have never found – or received reliable evidence – of heroin being trafficked in London in any other form than a tablet

Cooke, Head of London Police Drug Squad, 1962



Literature Search

- MEDLINE, Embase and PsychINFO
 - observational, follow-up and case reports
- Extracted data included:
 - recruitment years;
 - study length (or follow-up period);
 - mortality in absolute numbers (or % if available);
 - type of treatment available and other demographics (if available);
 - Annual mortality rates were calculated based on the period of recruitment of the studies.

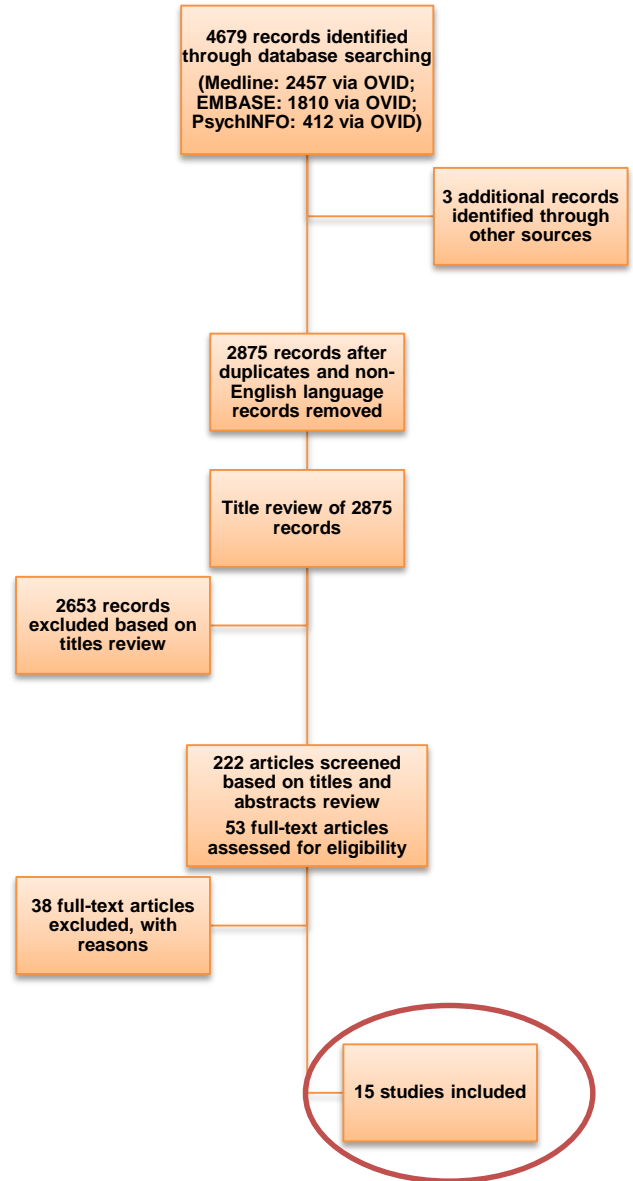
Included studies

Database search: 4979

Hand-searching: 3

After removal of
duplicates and non-
English language
records: 2875

Included Studies: 15



Overall Findings

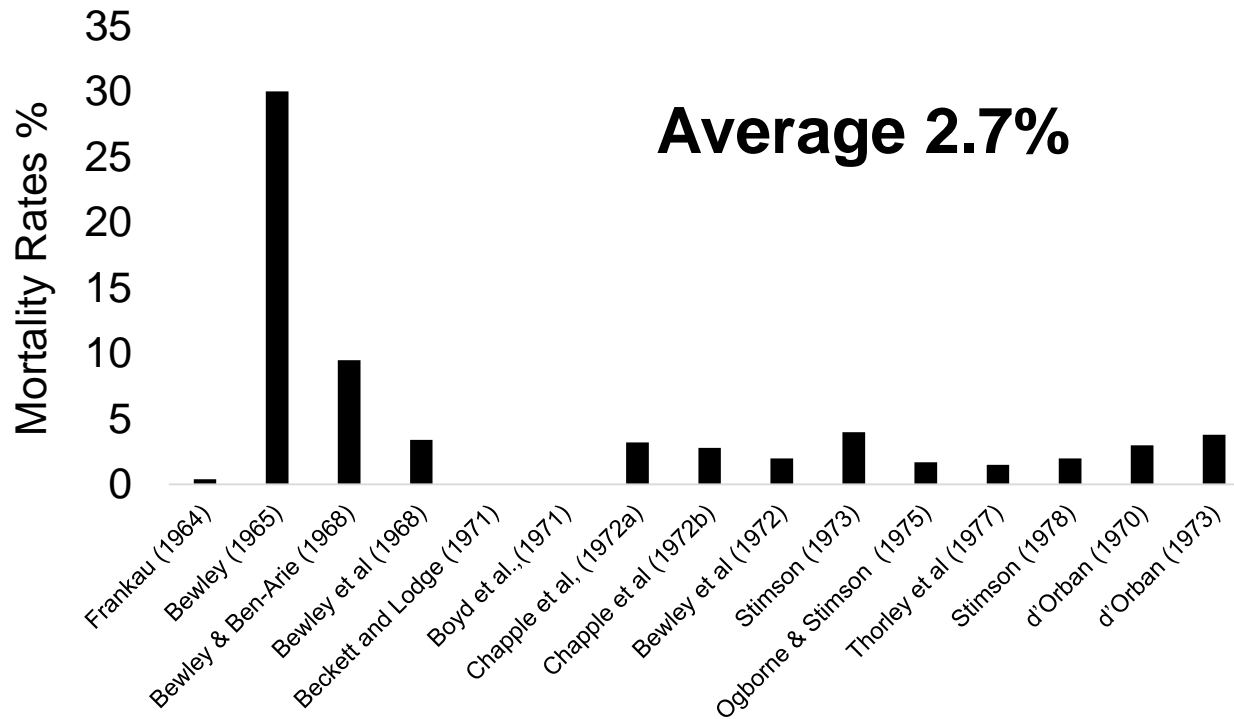
Cohort size varied (n=33 to n=397)

Length of study varied (6 to 84 months)

Mortality per study varied greatly (0% to 30%)

Age relatively low (average patient 25 years old)

Annualised Mortality Rates



Cohort Studies

Study	Sample Size	Follow-up period (months)	Mortality %	Annual Mortality (%)
Stimson (1972)	101	12	4	4
Ogborne & Stimson (1975)	128	42 to 48	6.2	1.6 to 1.8
Thorley et al (1977)	128	72	9	1.5
Stimson (1978)	128	84	12	2
Oppenheimer (1994)	128	264	38	1.8



Study	Sample Size	Follow-up period (months)	Mortality %	Annual Mortality (%)
Chapple et al, (1972a)	108	60	16	3.2
Chapple et al (1972b)	108	72	18	3

Study	Sample Size	Follow-up period (months)	Mortality %	Annual Mortality (%)
d'Orban (1973)	66	12	3	3
d'Orban (1973)	60	48	15	3.8

Deaths – How Prevalent?

Deaths occurred between the 1960s to mid-1970s, when take-home heroin prescribing prevalent:

- young cohorts;
- easy access to treatment;
- pharmaceutical heroin was both the drug of use and mainstay, primary medication

Can We Draw Comparisons?

International situation in 1960s/70s?

Study from the US:

- 1% mortality per year during similar period

A 20-Year Follow-Up of New York Narcotic Addicts

George E. Vaillant, MD, Cambridge, Mass

A group of 100 New York narcotic addicts first admitted to the US Public Health Service Hospital in Lexington, Ky in 1952 have been followed for 20 years. Over the period, 23% died—mostly of unnatural causes. In 1970 only 25% were still known to be using drugs; the status of 10% is uncertain; and, depending on definition, 35% to 42% had

as they mature. The present data suggest that unless adequate therapeutic intervention is made, there appears to be a significant number of addicts who will remain addicted, alive, and in trouble well past age 40. Few addicts recovered "spontaneously" and success rates of even 20%

Modern forms of prescribing heroin in UK?

Review of supervised heroin RCTs

- 0.7% mortality across all trials

Belgian study:

- No deaths after 12m follow-up

BJPsych

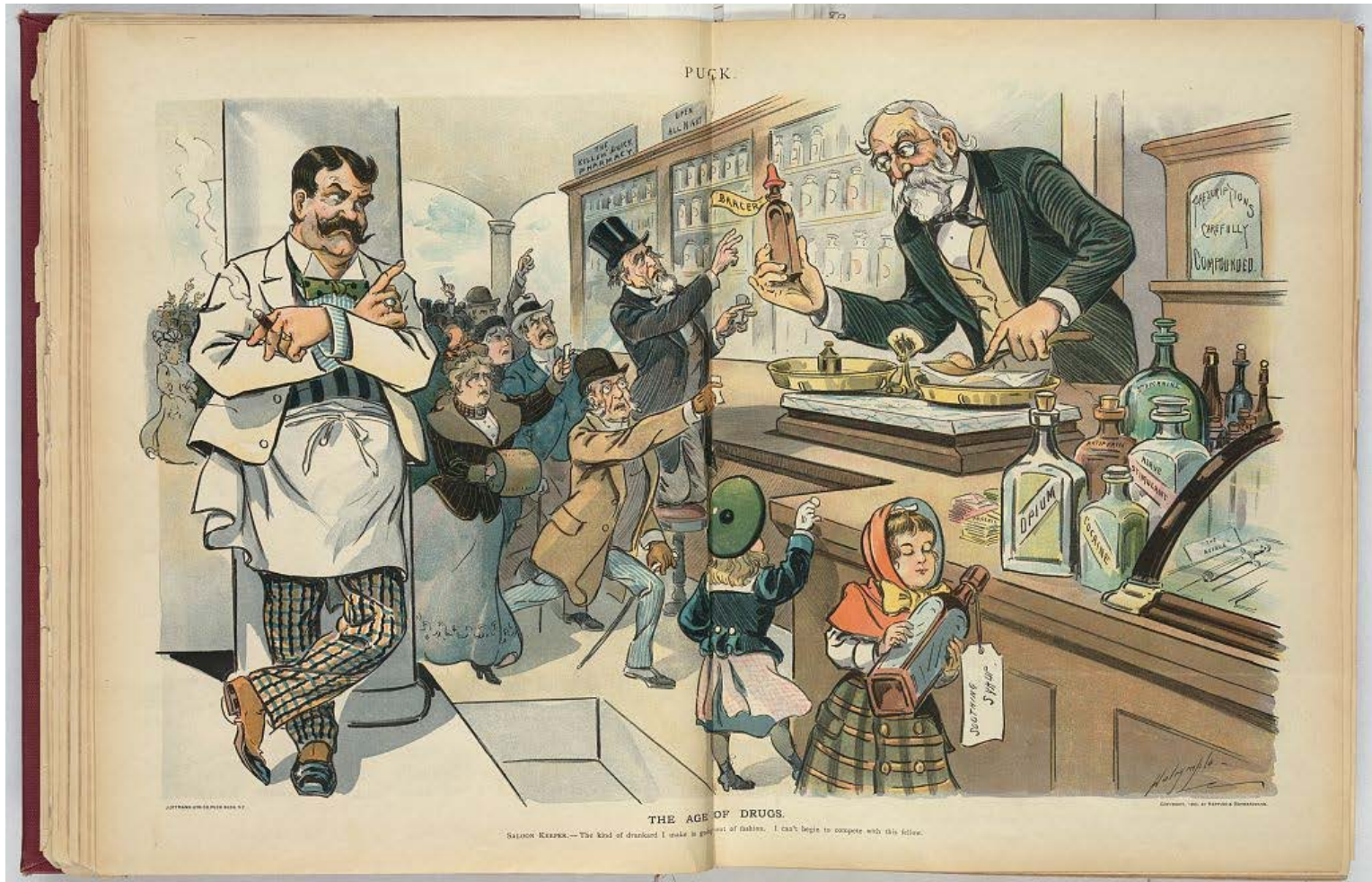
The British Journal of Psychiatry (2015)
207, 5–14. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.114.149195

Review article

Heroin on trial: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials of diamorphine-prescribing as treatment for refractory heroin addiction[†]

John Strang,* Teodora Groshkova,* Ambros Uchtenhagen, Wim van den Brink, Christian Haasen, Martin T. Schechter, Nick Lintzeris, James Bell, Alessandro Pirona, Eugenia Oviedo-Joekes, Roland Simon and Nicola Metrebian

Questions?



Thank you
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