

Towards less controlled procedures of opioid substitution treatment in Finland: experiences of patients and clinical staff

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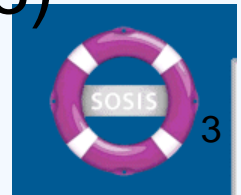
Drug use in Finland

- Scale of drug problem has been low
- The drug policy has been very strict
- 14 500 – 19 500 problem drug users
- Most intravenous users use amphetamines
- 34% of drug-addicted patients have reported buprenorphine as the main intoxicant, heroin 2%
- 4 000 – 6 000 opioid addicts



Opioid substitution treatment (OST) 1997-2008

- Assessment and start: in-patient clinics
- Treatment: clinic-based outpatient
- Programs have been strictly supervised
 - regular controlled drug-testing
 - psycho-social counselling
- Since 2004, the prescribing plain buprenorphine (Subutex®) has been allowed only in specific cases (e.g. pregnancy).
- Experiences of switching to buprenorphine-naloxone combination (Simojoki et al. 2008)



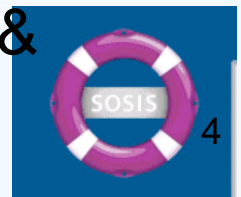
2/2008 A new Decree on the Treatment of Opioid Addicts by Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

Aims

- Starting the substitution treatment more quickly and more easily
- Assessment and start through outpatient clinics
- The maximum home dosage from 8 to 15 days
- The **buprenorphine-naloxone** combination (Suboxone®) – can be distributed from pharmacies when a specific contract is made with the treatment unit and the patient. **No methadone or buprenorphine** distribution from pharmacies.

Poster: Opioid substitution treatment and misuse of buprenorphine in Finland by Kaskela, Tourunen & Pitkänen

Pitkänen & Kaskela, 2009



Current situation of OST

- From 1 200 to 1 700 patients in OST
- Buprenorphine-naloxone 60%
- New harm-reduction procedures have been created
- Political interests – cheap and effective treatment...



Design of the study

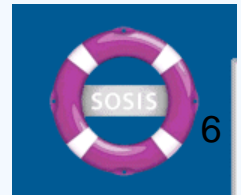
5 outpatient clinics in 2008-2009

75 patients ($\frac{1}{2}$ -8 years in treatment) were interviewed.

Nurses evaluated the current situation of 111 patients by filling in questionnaires.

The view of the personnel was studied conducting five group interviews and presenting a questionnaire, currently n=24 (out of 30).

Life-situation and history of the patients, and description and evaluation of the treatment by patients and personnel have been studied.



Characteristics of the patients

75%	Male	
37%	30 years or younger	(mean 32 years, min 22 max 55)
11%	Married	
52%	Own children	20% Living with children
32%	Living with a spouse	65% of spouses receive OST also
6-9%	Employed (part time or full time)	
31%	The longest period at work 6 months or less	
29%	Nine years of education or less	
56%	Had been imprisoned	
27%	Had tried to commit suicide	
76%	Hepatitis C	
1%	HIV	
60%	Started the use of alcohol at age 12 or earlier	
93%	IV use of buprenorphine, 86% heroin	



Medication

		OST began	before 2007	2007-2009	
	Suboxone		41 %	89 %	
	Subutex		16 %	0	
		mean	17 mg	22 mg	***
	Methadone		43 %	11 %	
		mean	136 mg	89 mg	*
	Benzodiazepines		89 %	92 %	
		mean	26 mg	53 mg	*
			n=44	n=54	

- 69% aimed to quit the use of substitution medication some day, 15% within 2 years
- One out of 85 patients, whose treatment was begun in 2002-2003, had successfully ended the use of substitution medicines.
- 31% did not plan to give up benzodiazepines.

Situation at treatment in 2009

	OST began	before 2007	2007-2009	
No missed appointments		81	82	
Give urine tests when asked		83	71	
Comes to get meds regularly		95	78	*
No extra use of the opiates		100	84	**
No extra use of the benzodiazepines		70	56	
No problems with alcohol		81	76	
No use of the stimulants		93	92	
No drunkenness or overdoses		85	68	*
No signs of recent injections		89	82	
No signs of misuse of the substitution meds		95	80	*
Psychic condition in balance		83	78	
Permanent living condition		95	90	
Home doses for 4-7 days		78	63	
		n=44	n=54	

The patients' views of the effects of OST (scale 4-10)

	Beginning	Now
Work, employment, financial situation	5,4	6,2***
Physical health	6,3	7,4***
Psychic health	6,3	8,0***
Family and relationships	6,4	8,2***
Use of alcohol	7,2	8,6***
Use of other drugs	5,5	8,7***
Criminality	6,8	9,2***

*** Paired sample t-test was significant $p < 0.001$



Characteristics of the staff

58%	Age 35+
92%	Females
57%	Nurses
38%	Work experience on OST 5+ years
91%	Feels that she/he has good competence for this work

Views of the staff

- OST works: it is good to see the small (and often slow) changes in the lives and attitudes of the patients
- several different kinds of treatment procedures
- the need to know the patient (individuality)
- pharmacy distribution of buprenorphine-naloxone started slowly
 - substance use and prescribed benzos; economical obstacles; situation and needs of the patients
- what are the aims of the treatment:
 - 44% think that the aim should be to quit the use of substitution medicines some day
 - 83% agree that non-medical treatment models should be introduced to the patients more actively



Conclusions

- the patients: many positive changes
- the staff: the situation at treatment had become better by time
- the need for several kinds of treatment models. However, an intensive period is needed at the beginning of the OST
- the need for longterm plans (aims of the treatment and economical)

