

Title:

Methadone Maintenance in Irish General Practice: Voices of Service Users.

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Background: The Methadone Treatment Protocol (MTP) was introduced in the Republic of Ireland in 1998 (DOH 1998). This legislation was intended to normalise drug treatment in primary care. The success of this intention had not been evaluated from the perspective of service users prior to this study and there has been reluctance among GP's to deal with the issues of drug misuse. Negative attitudes to methadone maintenance still prevail in Dublin (Wilkinson & Mistral 2003). The MTP has been in operation for a decade and users views needed to be considered.

Methods:

The study was guided by a phenomenological research design which investigated the experiences of service users. In depth interviews were used to explore the evaluation of the 'lived in and through' experience of receiving methadone treatment in general practice.

Key informant interviews

Three service users were purposively chosen as key informants and their perceptions informed the study.

Population:

25 Participants who were registered on a MTP with their GP were purposefully sampled from a population of 9 practice sites in Dublin.

Recruitment

GP's were approached to purposively select participants who are registered with their practice. His/her personal knowledge of their patients were drawn upon to identify participants with a range of diverse characteristics.

Inclusion Criteria:

- a) Those who were willing to participate and provide informed consent
- b) Level One and Level Two participants. (Those who attend a doctor who is qualified to treat at Level One i.e. stable patients and those who attend a doctor qualified at Level Two i.e. less stable patients.

Exclusion Criteria: a) Patients who refused consent b) Severe Psychiatric co-morbidity as assessed by their GP.

Data Analysis

The psychological research methods advocated by Colaizzi (1978) produced a structural definition of the findings.

Initial reading of all the 'protocols' (transcripts) to acquire a feeling for them was followed by Colaizzi's six steps of analysis.

Preliminary Results

Four themes emerged from the data which contributed to understanding current practice and policy and identified areas for improvement in the treatment of drug misusers in general practice. The analysis is still in process.

References:

Colaizzi, P.F. (1978) Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Views It. In: *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology* (Valle, R, S.King.M.eds) Oxford University Press, Chapter 3:48-71

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Wilkinson, S. Mistral, W (2003) GP Experiences and Perceptions of Methadone Maintenance in the Eastern Region of Ireland. Mental Health Research and Development Unit, University Of Bath.