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Pathways into Receiving a Prescription f
Diamorphine (Heroin) for the Treatmen
Opiate Dependence in the United Kingd

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Key Words
Diamorphine prescription · Opiate dependence

Abstract
In the UK, few doctors prescribe diamorphine for the treatment of opiate dependence to a small number of patients. A retrospective case note review of patients receiving diamorphine in 2000 was conducted in the UK to determine how and why these patients came to receive a prescription for diamorphine. Patient eligibility criteria were examined together with doctors' stated reasons for initiating a diamorphine (heroin) prescription. Two hundred and ten sets of patients' case notes were reviewed at 27 of the 42 (64%) drug clinics in England and Wales where diamorphine was prescribed by the doctor. There appeared to be a general consensus among the few doctors who had prescribed diamorphine that it was a treatment of last resort, for those with long histories of heroin use and injecting, and those who had not responded sufficiently well to previous other treatments. However, there was also a small number of patients initiated on diamorphine without ever having previously received opiate treatments and some because they were experiencing problems injecting methadone. This reflects the UK history of the individual doctor's clinical autonomy in deciding when diamorphine is appropriate and the previous lack of nationally agreed patient eligibility criteria.

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Introduction

Since 1968 in
psychiatrists, lic
diamorphine fo
guidelines on th
[1–3] advised d
scription of opio
ist doctor at a dr
rather than inje
morphine treatm
few (46) doctors
patients were re
very uneven geo
ing diamorphin
There has bee
to base this clini
no consensus on
tions, dose or dis
al guidance on
result of a renew
option [7]. The
which a prescrip
review of the c
phine in 2000 w
patients came t
as part of routin
policy and guidance on prescribing diamorphine was introduced, and about which very little is known.

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Abstract

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