
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2014HLTH0086-001131
August 7, 2014

Ministry of Health
Office of the Provincial Health Officer

Methadone saves lives, lowers health-care costs: Report

VICTORIA – Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall released his second report today on B.C.'s opioid substitution treatment system, showing both methadone and the newer Suboxone have helped decrease mortality rates and reduce health-care costs for opioid dependent patients.

“Treating and responding to drug addiction is a complex challenge and methadone and Suboxone are important parts of our treatment programs,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “I am encouraged by the findings in this report that indicate that B.C.'s opioid substitution treatment system is saving patients' lives and saving the health-care system and society money.”

Dr. Kendall's report found that mortality rates for people in opioid substitution treatment have fallen to 1.1 deaths per 100 person years, compared to an estimated 2.1 deaths per 100 person years for people using street heroin. The report also noted that the annual per-patient costs for opioid substitution treatment in B.C. averages around \$4,200 (including physician, pharmacy and drug costs). In Ontario and the U.S.A., untreated opioid dependence has been estimated to cost between \$40,000 and \$45,000 per person when health care, law enforcement and other social costs are taken into account.

“B.C.'s methadone and Suboxone treatments have continued to grow to meet the clinical needs of those with dependence on opioid drugs such as heroin, morphine and oxycodone,” said Kendall. “The program extends beyond the Vancouver region and the number of participating pharmacists now reaches 3,000, meaning easier access to treatment and that more participants can work and still receive daily observed treatment.”

Opioid substitution treatment is recognized by the World Health Organization as an essential health-system response both to treat opioid dependence and to prevent the transmission of blood-borne pathogens, such as HIV and hepatitis C. The provincial opioid substitution treatment system works to support, enhance and deliver responsive and effective health-care services for patients throughout B.C. while ensuring value for money. This program is jointly supported by the Ministry of Health's PharmaCare program, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia and the College of Pharmacists of BC.

To review a copy of the report, BC Opioid Substitution Treatment System, please visit:
<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho/reports/special.html>

Media Contact:

Kristy Anderson
Media Relations Manager
Ministry of Health
250 952-1887 (media line)

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect