Reviewer's report

Title: The safe implementation of a prison-based methadone maintenance programme: 7 year time-series analysis of primary care prescribing data

Version: 1 Date: 29 January 2014

Reviewer: Sarah Larney

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes methadone prescribing trends in a UK prison after the introduction of specially trained medical provider/s. The paper notes that methadone maintenance prescribing increased over time, and no methadone-related deaths occurred. The paper addresses a safety concern that is commonly presented as an argument against methadone prescribing in prisons and hence is a useful contribution to the literature. I have a few comments regarding the manuscript, all of which could probably be considered minor essential revisions:

Background:
Don’t really need all the incarceration rates for the various countries; could just note that England and Wales has a moderate incarceration rate compared to the international situation.

There is some use of UK-specific language that international readers may not understand. In the background, this includes referring to class A drugs; could just delete this phrase as the sentence would still be comprehensible.

“At that time the vast majority of primary care services were provided by medics employed by the Home Office and not the NHS” – is ‘medics’ a bit colloquial? Also, spell out NHS the first time.

“In the year following release, the drug-related mortality rate was 5.2 per 1000 among men” – should be per 1000 per annum? Same for the statistic for women in that same sentence.

“This data highlights” – data is a plural, so it should be “these data highlight”.

In the description of the Dolan and Kinlock studies, it is important to note that the outcomes for Dolan are in-prison outcomes and the Kinlock are post-release.

The last sentence of the background seems to be struggling to find a rationale. I think a perfectly acceptable rationale is that it is an analysis of prescribing data that took place at the introduction of the GPs. If the authors keep the sentence as is, it should include the words ‘in correctional settings’ or similar at the end.

Method:
“All new inductions...” Perhaps make clear it’s treatment inductions, rather than inductions to prison.

Are the mainstream GP clinics where people are followed up in prison also?
As a non-clinical person, I have no idea what the abbreviation ‘od’ after the dose amount is – please use a non-jargon term.

What is the process for people who enter prison while being prescribe methadone outside?

Was there any adjustment in the analysis for multiple incarcerations?

Results:
The results section appears to be the first time the name of the prison is mentioned. It would perhaps be useful to mention it in the methods and also spell out ‘HMP’ the first time.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests