

# A cross-sectional prevalence survey of psychotropic medication prescribing patterns in prisons in England

Lamiece Hassan,<sup>1\*</sup> Martin Frisher,<sup>2</sup> Jane Senior,<sup>1</sup>  
Mary Tully,<sup>3</sup> Roger Webb,<sup>1</sup> David While<sup>1</sup>  
and Jenny Shaw<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Mental Health and Risk, Institute of Brain and Behaviour,  
The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Keele University, Keele, UK

<sup>3</sup>Manchester Pharmacy School, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

\*Corresponding author

**Declared competing interests of authors:** none

Published September 2014

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02330

## Plain English summary

### Psychotropic medication prescribing patterns in prisons

Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 33

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02330

NIHR Journals Library [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

## Plain English summary

In prisons, mental illnesses such as depression and schizophrenia are more common than in the general population. Therefore, the level of need for mental health treatment is high, which may include prescribed medicines such as antidepressants. Currently, there are no data on the frequency or types of medicines prescribed to prisoners for mental health problems. However, researchers and patients have questioned the reasons for, and suitability and safety of, prescribing mental health drugs in prison.

In a national survey of 11 prisons, prescription and clinical data were extracted from patient health-care records. Overall, 17% of men and 48% of women in prison were prescribed at least one mental health medicine. Prescribing rates in prison were four times higher among men and six times higher among women than among patients in the community. Prisoners were more likely than community patients to receive certain medicines associated with sedation and weight gain. One-third of mental health medicines were prescribed for conditions not approved by current guidelines.

Patients attending general practitioner appointments in prison rated the acceptability of prescribing decisions. One in four patients identified a mental health issue as their main problem. These individuals were more likely to receive a new prescription, but less likely to be satisfied overall with consultation outcomes than those presenting with other health problems.

The evidence from this study shows very high rates of mental health medication prescribing in prisons, particularly among women. Further work is necessary to determine the optimum balance between medication and alternative treatments for mentally ill prisoners.

# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) ([www.publicationethics.org/](http://www.publicationethics.org/)).

Editorial contact: [nihredit@southampton.ac.uk](mailto:nihredit@southampton.ac.uk)

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr). Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)

## Criteria for inclusion in the *Health Services and Delivery Research* journal

Reports are published in *Health Services and Delivery Research* (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

## HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: <http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr>

## This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 10/2002/03. The contractual start date was in March 2012. The final report began editorial review in December 2013 and was accepted for publication in May 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

**© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2014. This work was produced by Hassan *et al.* under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.**

Published by the NIHR Journals Library ([www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk)), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland ([www.prepress-projects.co.uk](http://www.prepress-projects.co.uk)).

## **Health Services and Delivery Research Editor-in-Chief**

**Professor Ray Fitzpatrick** Professor of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Oxford, UK

## **NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief**

**Professor Tom Walley** Director, NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies and Director of the HTA Programme, UK

## **NIHR Journals Library Editors**

**Professor Ken Stein** Chair of HTA Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

**Professor Andree Le May** Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (EME, HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

**Dr Martin Ashton-Key** Consultant in Public Health Medicine/Consultant Advisor, NETSCC, UK

**Professor Matthias Beck** Chair in Public Sector Management and Subject Leader (Management Group), Queen's University Management School, Queen's University Belfast, UK

**Professor Aileen Clarke** Professor of Public Health and Health Services Research, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

**Dr Tessa Crilly** Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

**Dr Peter Davidson** Director of NETSCC, HTA, UK

**Ms Tara Lamont** Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

**Professor Elaine McColl** Director, Newcastle Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, UK

**Professor William McGuire** Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

**Professor Geoffrey Meads** Professor of Health Sciences Research, Faculty of Education, University of Winchester, UK

**Professor Jane Norman** Professor of Maternal and Fetal Health, University of Edinburgh, UK

**Professor John Powell** Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

**Professor James Raftery** Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

**Dr Rob Riemsma** Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

**Professor Helen Roberts** Professor of Child Health Research, University College London, UK

**Professor Helen Snooks** Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Please visit the website for a list of members of the NIHR Journals Library Board:  
[www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors)

**Editorial contact:** [nihredit@southampton.ac.uk](mailto:nihredit@southampton.ac.uk)