

Reduction in suicides after withdrawal of painkiller

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The phasing out of co-proxamol has not lead to an increase in deaths involving other painkillers and prescribed drugs.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Withdrawal of the painkiller co-proxamol from use in the UK has led to a major reduction in suicides and accidental poisonings involving the drug, research led by Oxford University has shown.

The study, published in the [British Medical Journal](#), shows that this has occurred without an increase in deaths from other painkillers.

Co-proxamol was the most commonly prescribed drug used in suicides and was responsible for 766 deaths between 1997 and 1999 in England and Wales.

In 2005, concerns about large numbers of fatal poisonings led the Committee on Safety in Medicines to announce the phasing out of co-proxamol from use in the UK by the end of 2007.

Professor Keith Hawton from the University of Oxford and colleagues set out to assess whether this initiative has been effective and reduced the number of poisoning deaths.

They used national records to determine the impact of the announcement of co-proxamol withdrawal on prescribing practices in England and Wales between 1998 and 2007. The team also compared deaths from co-proxamol with other painkillers mostly likely to be used instead of co-proxamol: cocodamol, codeine, codydramol, dihydrocodeine, and non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs.

The researchers found a steep fall of 59% in the prescribing of co-proxamol following the announcement in 2005. This was accompanied by significant increases in the prescribing of other painkillers, including cocodamol, paracetamol, and [codeine](#).

These changes in prescribing practices were accompanied by 295 fewer suicides. When accidental poisonings were included in the total, there were 349 fewer deaths. There was not an increase in deaths involving other painkillers and prescribed drugs.

This, say the researchers, shows that concerns about the possible substitution of [suicide](#) method involving other painkillers were unfounded.

The findings suggest that the UK initiative has been an effective measure, and highlights how regulatory authorities 'can have an important public health function', they conclude.

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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