

Client experience of depot-buprenorphine two years post implementation- barriers to treatment and challenges of COVID-19.

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Introduction: Depot-buprenorphine products became available for people with opioid use disorder in 2019. During COVID-19 restrictions, the implementation of depot-buprenorphine was upscaled rapidly to reduce time spent at clinics and the risk of diversion of takeaway opioid agonist treatment (OAT). We explore the patient experience of depot-buprenorphine two-years post implementation including experience of COVID-related treatment changes and perceived barriers to treatment.

Method: Thirteen clients of an inner-city public OAT service in Sydney treated with or considering depot-buprenorphine were invited to take part in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview to explore their experience of and attitudes to depot-buprenorphine. Interviews were 25-60 minutes in duration. All participants received a \$30 shopping voucher for participation.

Key Findings: Clients receiving depot-buprenorphine treatment overall viewed it as a positive intervention, relative to their previous experience of OAT. Flexibility, abstinence, and separation from other users were described as the most beneficial aspects of depot-buprenorphine. Even patients initiated to depot-buprenorphine, despite preference for another OAT, considered it a better treatment option. Those considering depot-buprenorphine, but who had not started, identified fear of withdrawal, being unable to use other opioids and change in routine as the biggest factors for delaying or not starting depot-buprenorphine.

Discussions and Conclusions: Despite the rapid implementation brought about by COVID-restrictions, participants receiving depot-buprenorphine viewed its introduction as a positive intervention with social and financial benefits. These findings support the conclusions of pre-implementation research.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): This study suggests depot buprenorphine has been a positive addition to opioid treatment.

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