



25th February 2019

Deputy John Curran, TD
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

Re PQ: 7108/19

To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been in receipt of Suboxone in each of the past five years; the number receiving Suboxone; if an evaluation of the treatment has been undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Curran,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

In January 2016, the Director General of the HSE submitted the final report of the Opioid Substitution Implementation Group to the Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy. The report recommended the phased increased access to Suboxone (buprenorphine/naloxone) for groups of patients in specific circumstances, subject to resourcing and the required legislation being enacted.

The Misuse of Drugs (Supervision of Prescription and Supply of Methadone and Medicinal Products containing Buprenorphine authorised for Opioid Substitution Treatment) Regulations 2017 came into effect on 22nd November 2017. The purpose of these Regulations is to provide access to certain buprenorphine-based medicinal products for Opioid Substitution Treatment (including buprenorphine/naloxone and buprenorphine only) on the same statutory basis as methadone.

Following the publication of the regulations discussions took place between the PCRS and the drug company supplying the product in relation to pricing and the administrative codes for the reimbursement of pharmacies.

The phased rollout of suboxone commenced on 1st May 2018 and allowed for prescribing of this product by trained Doctors working in HSE Addiction service and specifically approved Level 1 and Level 2 GPs outside the Dublin region. This rollout then extended to suitably trained Level 1 and 2 GPs within the Dublin region in October 2018.

The HSE Addiction services have provided training to HSE Addiction staff and community based GPs in relation to buprenorphine containing products to include the prescribing and dispensing of suboxone on seven separate occasions since October 2017. In addition, the ICGP in conjunction with the HSE



provided training to community based GPs in relation to buprenorphine and buprenorphine/naloxone in October 2018.

This has resulted in an increase in the number of patients receiving treatment for Opioid Dependence with buprenorphine/naloxone (suboxone) over the last number of months. The following table gives an indication of the numbers of people in receipt of treatment with Buprenorphine/naloxone (suboxone) over the last 5 years and the number of people prescribed this drug at the end of each calendar year.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Patients at end of period	74	78	93	110	177
Actual Patients attending during period	118	115	129	133	220

This shows a significant increase in actual patients receiving treatment with suboxone between 2017 and 2018, when rollout commenced, of 65%.

Currently there are 182 patients in receipt of treatment with buprenorphine/naloxone (suboxone).

In relation to evaluation of the treatment, a rigorous audit process was recommended in the final report of the Opioid Substitution Implementation Group. Data is currently being collected on a routine basis in relation to each patient prescribed buprenorphine/naloxone. However given the fact that the expanded rollout did not commence until October 2018, the analysis of this data will not take place until a year after this date. Data is also being collected on an ongoing basis in relation to the training provided by the HSE and this will be analysed in due course.

The provision and expansion of buprenorphine/naloxone (suboxone) prescribing is in line with one of our key actions under the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - to improve the availability of Opioid Substitution Treatments (2.1.14). The provision of this medication is expected to continue to expand over the coming year.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Eamon Keenan
National Clinical Lead – Addictions Services