



Naloxone

Background

In 2014 Scotland recorded 613 drug related deaths, an increase of 16% on the previous year and the highest number ever recorded. Opioids such as heroin, morphine and methadone were implicated or potentially contributed to 87% of deaths. Naloxone is a World Health Organisation recommended medicine with proven efficacy in temporarily reversing the effects of opioid overdoses. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) present evidence that the use of naloxone as an initial intervention, until medical treatment is carried out, will prevent many of the deaths attributed to heroin overdose (ACMD 2012).

Current situation

Recent legislative changes aim to increase access to naloxone for use in an emergency situation. The main change is that any worker in a drug treatment service commissioned by a local authority or NHS can now supply naloxone without prescription to any individual needing access for emergency use. Regulations will allow those services to obtain stocks of Naloxone Hydrochloride and supply it to anyone requiring access for use in an emergency involving a heroin overdose. This will include drug users, their family members and carers.

Drug treatment services are generally seen to be those providing specialist services, primary care drug treatment, and needle and syringe programmes (including pharmacy-based programmes).

These services will legally be able to order naloxone and their staff will be able to supply it to individuals without needing a prescription or any other written instruction from a health professional. These individuals could be drug users themselves, or it could be family members, friends, carers or hostel managers who may need easy access to the medication.

Position of Scottish Families

Scottish Families contributed to the review of naloxone provision and have long considered the wider distribution of naloxone a critical development for protecting the health and wellbeing of people who inject drugs and their families. Scottish Families Chief Executive, Christine Duncan sits on the National Naloxone Advisory Group putting the organisation in an ideal position to identify the positive effects the wider distribution of naloxone can have on service users, family members and treatment providers.

Whilst the widening of the supply of naloxone is to be welcomed it is essential that this is in conjunction with suitable training in recognising and responding to an overdose emergency for those

likely to be in such a situation. Scottish Families would like to see naloxone readily available as an emergency, lifesaving drug and for first aid training to the wider workforce cover overdose and naloxone administration.