



Painkiller Addiction Information Network (PAIN) Press Release  
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The Painkiller Addiction Information Network (PAIN) charity welcomes the report 'Highways and Buyways' released today by DrugWise, which highlights the 'elephant in the room' healthcare scandal of addiction to prescribed medication in the UK.

Despite focusing on the illicit 'street' drug scene in the UK in 2016, the report also shows there is an urgent and growing issue of dependence upon drugs such as opioid painkillers, tranquillisers and sleeping tablets prescribed by GPs in ever growing numbers, as well as misuse and abuse of over-the-counter drugs such as strong painkillers.

Chief Executive of PAIN and former painkiller addict, author of Coming Clean: Diary of a Painkiller Addict, Cathryn Kemp said: "PAIN is the UK's first and only charity dedicated to raising awareness of addiction to prescribed and OTC painkillers.

"It is clear from this report there is an urgent need for NHS England to address addiction to prescribed medication, including opioid painkillers.

"Strong painkillers can create a dependency in only three days' continual use, and our anecdotal evidence from patients suffering addiction to their medications is that little, if anything, is being done to support them.

"We are calling for specialised treatment services to help patients recover from dependency on drugs they have been prescribed by the doctors and GPs they trust to care for them.

**"It is time we recognised this is a growing issue and a ticking time-bomb for the NHS."**

**The DrugWise report states:**

- 28 million people in the UK living with chronic pain (defined as pain lasting longer than three months)
- Around 10 million people receive regular prescriptions for opiate painkillers



- There has been a 400% increase in prescriptions for those drugs in the past ten years
- Around 80 million prescriptions a year written for tranquillisers and antidepressants
- 500% increase in prescriptions for antidepressants since 1992<sup>1</sup>

The report also states that “general practitioners, psychiatrists and pain specialists are the primary legal source of all these drugs and so are part of the problem as well as being critical to the solution...In relation to drug deaths, the ACMD reported that, *“there has been a marked and consistent year-on-year increase in the number of deaths found to involve tramadol...and...codeine.”*”

It is clear from the report that prescribed and OTC drugs such as opioid painkillers are being widely misused, both across the patient and poly-drug user populations.

PAIN is calling for clear patient recovery pathways to be initiated, with specialised services for those who are self-medicating untreated chronic pain levels. The ONS reported a significant rise in drug deaths from painkillers (tramadol, codeine and fentanyl) in the year 2014-15.

Cathryn Kemp said: “The DrugWise report shows it is time for action. Addiction services and pain teams must work together to help patients find recovery from prescribed drug dependence.”

For more information about PAIN, go to [www.painkillerfree.co.uk](http://www.painkillerfree.co.uk), or find us on Twitter @PAINcharity. Contact: Cathryn Kemp [cathrynkemp@hotmail.com](mailto:cathrynkemp@hotmail.com), 07816780159

<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, H.(2015), Opiate painkiller dependency:an overview. A report written for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prescribed Drug Dependence. <http://prescribeddrug.org/evidence/>. Council for Evidence-Based Psychiatry (2015) Briefing note for the APPG. <http://prescribeddrug.org/evidence/>

