

HSS (MD) 03/2017

URGENT COMMUNICATION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health & Social
Care Board/ HSC Trusts/NIAS
Executive Medical Dir/Dir of Public Health, Public Health
Agency (*for onward distribution to relevant health
protection staff*)
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board
All General Practitioners
(*for onward distribution to practice staff*)
GP Locums
Family Practitioner Service Leads, HSC Board
(*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)
Medical Directors HSC Trusts
(*for onward cascade to: Staff in A&E Departments and
Services dealing with drug misuse*)
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts
(*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses*)

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Stormont Estate
Belfast BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 0563
Fax: 028 9052 0574
Email: Michael.McBride@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS (MD) 03/2017
Date: 9 March 2017

Dear Colleague

CONCERNS RE SYNTHETIC OPIOID ANALGESIC U47,700

The Drug & Alcohol Monitoring & Information System (DAMIS) has received information relating to a synthetic opioid analgesic U47,700. This substance, believed to be a powder, has so far been linked to two deaths in Northern Ireland during November and December 2016, and also linked to a further three cases in December where the user was found unconscious and required to be admitted to hospital.

Some of the people who used the substance appear to have been sold the substance as cocaine. It may also be the case that some believed it to be heroin. It is suspected the U47,700 is linked to its availability the Ballymena area. It is also believed the presence of U47,700 is new to Northern Ireland.

U47,700 has been linked to numerous deaths in the USA, North England and Scotland.

At this time we do not have any further details. However, it is important that frontline staff are aware that people may report or be presented as having taken a stimulant substance, such as cocaine, but symptoms closer to opioid overdose. Acute toxic effects and overdoses should be managed symptomatically and may need urgent referral to ED.

Circulation and further Information

The purpose of this letter is to ask you to circulate this information as appropriate to relevant clinical services, and to ask if any services – including Emergency Departments – are aware of related cases or additional information.

If you have any information on people who may have used this substance and experienced unpleasant or unexpected side-effects, please send this to the DAMIS (PHA) Co-ordination Team at: damis@hscni.net.

Advice to Users

Users should be made aware of the risks involved with these substances. As always, anyone who is at risk of opioid overdose should be encouraged to contact their local Community Addiction Team (see *contact details below*) to request a Take Home Naloxone pack – this can reverse the effects of opioid overdose and could save their life.

If you are asked for advice by people taking, or thinking of taking, synthetic opioids, the following is suggested:

- the best advice is to not take drugs, as they can be dangerous;
- taking any unknown substance, mixture or powder when you don't know what's in it is a big risk;
- up-to-date information for people considering using drugs, including advice on reducing risk, is available from www.talktofrank.com or from their Helpline on 0800 77 66 00;

Community Addiction Teams

Belfast area	Drug Outreach Team, Glendinning House, 6 Murray Street, Belfast (028) 9504 7301
South Eastern area	Community Addiction Teams Down: (028) 4451 3921 / Lisburn: (028) 9266 8607
Northern area	Community Addiction Service, 105a Railway Street, Ballymena (028) 2531 7162
Southern area	Community Addiction Team (028) 3741 2397
Western area	Community Addiction Teams Derry: (028) 7186 5237 / Omagh: (028) 8283 5453

Yours sincerely



Dr MICHAEL McBRIDE
Chief Medical Officer

cc: Dr Anne Kilgallen
Dr Ian McMaster
Dr Mark Timoney
Prof Michael Mawhinney
Dr Liz Redmond
Gary Maxwell
Ann Williamson
Peter Moore

This letter is available on the DoH website at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/letters-and-urgent-communications-2017>