



Knowledge and Library Services (KLS)

Impact stories

Title: A KLS literature search contributed to the first comprehensive review of the impact of prescribed medicines in relation to dependence and withdrawal.

User testimonial:

“Anh Tran, KLS Senior Knowledge and Evidence Manager supported the evidence review of prescribed medicines associated with dependence or withdrawal, and, became a vital and integral part of the team throughout the life of the project. Initially Anh undertook a scoping review of the literature to assist in identifying the scale of the literature review that was to be commissioned as part of the project. Anh went on to support the project team in drafting the specification and took an active role in the commissioning process. Her expert knowledge of the literature review methodology was invaluable to the specification development and in the commissioning panel. She attended regular project meetings to advise on technical aspects of the review and helped to monitor and problem solve alongside the project team.

Anh later provided a further literature review which focussed on prevalence estimates of prescribed medicine dependence which helped the team advise other researchers who were then able to include a discussion section in their final report on the quality of previous estimates. This saved the team time and costs which would have been incurred if commissioned externally”. **Pete Burkinshaw, Treatment and Recovery Manager. Alcohol and Drugs, PHE**

Challenge:

Our challenge was to undertake a rigorous evidence review of medicines associated with dependence and withdrawal which drew upon the best scientific evidence and to include the patient's voice within our project. The scientific evidence base which specifically focussed on our research questions proved to be weak. The project included a call for papers on reports summarising patients' experience, and service models, which helped to address the weakness in the evidence to some extent.

Anh advised us throughout on the methodology and parameters of the review and its component parts. The review subject was highly controversial with considerable vested interest on all sides of the debate, which is frequently very heated and goes to the heart of the role of medicine in mental health and pain management and the efficacy of

pharmacotherapy. Remaining impartial while delivering meaningful findings, where the patient experience was often at odds with high quality frequently pharmaceutical industry funded clinical trials, required us to have a rigorous and transparent methodology.

Solution:

PHE produced the first comprehensive review of the impact of prescribed medicines in relation to dependence and withdrawal, including a rapid evidence assessment and analysis of national prescription data (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prescribed-medicines-review-report>). This was the first time the data had been analysed at patient level. The review married all its components, including the patients' voice, in a balanced and methodologically sound way to produce a public health review of the impact of an important aspect of medical practice.

Impact:

The impact of the evidence review overall is accumulating, as it was only published in September 2019. However, it has received positive feedback from important stakeholders from a range of organisations who are committed to undertaking the recommendations forward. The impact of the rigour with which the published evidence review was undertaken is that the larger project stands up to scrutiny, and decisions about the methodology, and rationale for the range and type of literature within scope were clearly stated.

The review was referenced in Conservative Party manifesto commitments and covered in 227 pieces of media coverage including 60 on national broadcast media. It was also referenced by the SoS for Health in numerous speeches and media coverage and has resulted in an action plan being led by NHSE and DHSC, with contributions from NICE, CQC, MHRA and a range of royal colleges and professional bodies. Among other elements of the action plan, NHSE is developing a legacy data-set, to monitor change and impact on an ongoing basis.

Success factors:

Success factors included the ability of the wider team, including KLS, to adapt and persist when problems occurred, for example when the results of the commissioned literature review showed that the published evidence base was weak. The project was politically sensitive and had media and patient group attention throughout, not all of which was supportive or helpful. Having a clear rationale and rigorous process helped us to keep on track and deliver a high-quality review, which was honest about the standard of evidence available, while being inclusive of patients' experiences.

Consistent and boundaried engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders, which ultimately developed consensus in a highly-contested area of medicine, was also key to the success of the project. Having sound and defensible methods was an important part of this and helped us successfully manage criticism from organisations such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the pharmaceutical industry.

Lessons learned:

Time spent planning and scoping the project was time well spent. The subject is much wider than the scope we set and further work is needed, but it would have been impossible to include all associated issues within the timeframe and resources of the project.

The difficulties of managing stakeholders who formed our expert reference group were made more manageable by keeping to a clear plan and an insistence on high quality in the evidence that was included.

Involve KLS early and consistently throughout the project.

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