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USE OF CODEINE-CONTAINING MEDICINES BY PATIENTS ADMITTED TO AN ACUTE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

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Background: Anecdotal evidence suggests that the general public including patients with mental health problems are largely unaware of the potential risks of codeine abuse and dependence. Despite this, little research has been done in establishing the public's level of awareness on this issue.

Objective: To assess the extent of use of codeine-containing preparations, as well as the level of knowledge regarding the dependency potential of codeine, in patients admitted to an acute psychiatric hospital.

Method: 150 patients admitted consecutively to an acute psychiatric hospital over a 2 month period were asked to fill out an anonymous 18-item semi-structured questionnaire. The results were compiled and analysed using descriptive statistics with SPSS version 17.

Results: 116 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 77% (54% female, mean age 46.7 years, SD=15 years). 90% of respondents reported that they had ever used codeine-containing medications, 80% have bought them over the counter, 65% always used them without prescription, and 7% reported daily use of such medicines. 14% reported using them for the euphoriant effect, 5% to curb cravings, and the remaining mainly for migraines or aches and pains. 11% of all patients had used a codeine-containing medication as recently as 24 hours prior to their admission and 66% of patients indicated that they were aware of the dependence potential of codeine.

Conclusion: Awareness among psychiatric patients regarding the dependence potential of codeine is high. Additionally, a considerable proportion of patients indicated use of codeine for euphoriant effects or to curb cravings