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Media release

28 June 2021

Opioids research finds overdose risk factors

New research from the University of Stirling has identified potential major risk factors leading to overdose in patients taking prescription medication.

Working in partnership with NHS Fife, the University of St Andrews and Glasgow Caledonian University, the Stirling team studied data from GP practices across the Fife region, looking at more than 42,000 patients who had been prescribed opioids over the previous six-month period.

Around one third of patients (14,079) had been prescribed a strong opioid – a range of pain-relieving medication prescribed for acute pain, cancer pain, chronic pain, palliative care or to manage dependence on illicit drugs like heroin.

The research found the most common comorbidities – the presence of two or more diseases in the same person – and overdose risk factors among those prescribed a strong opioid, were pain (67.2%), cardiovascular disease (43.3%), mental health problems (39.3%) and respiratory disease (25.6%).

The number of patients living in the most deprived areas was also found to be significantly associated with the proportion prescribed a strong opioid.

Joe Schofield of the University of Stirling and a researcher on the project, said: “Our work shows there is likely to be a large population of people prescribed strong opioids across Scotland, many of whom will be at increased risk of overdose, especially those prescribed multiple medications and who have other health conditions. We found those at risk tended to be older, female, and living in areas of high social deprivation.

“There is a need to explore practical interventions to reduce the risk of overdose within this group and clinical practice may need to be tightened to minimise overdose risk for individuals prescribed strong opioids.

“We welcome NHS Fife’s commitment to patient safety demonstrated by their funding of this study as part of wider quality improvement work – and we recommend that other Health Boards take a similar approach to reduce the risk of harms to people prescribed opioids across Scotland.”

The study was funded by a Research and Development bursary from NHS Fife. Deborah Steven is the lead pharmacist for pain management in Fife and was co-investigator for the project.

She said: “We know that opioids can be useful for some people, but for others can cause issues in the short and long-term. These can include side effects, such as dependency; risk of overdose and, in some circumstances, a worsening of their pain.

“It’s vital that these types of medicines are being used safely and effectively and this research has allowed us to better understand current prescribing of opioids to patients locally. Furthermore, the research is also helping individual medical practices to support their patients currently prescribed

❖ POOR Study press release

these medicines, while reducing the risk of accidental harm in patients benefitting from taking opioid medications.

“In the longer term, the research has provided us with a firm, evidence-based grounding to move forward with wider proposals around pain medicines safety here in Fife.”

It is hoped the study will impact policy and practice, with researchers advising that risk could be reduced by implementing additional clinical governance such as auditing local prescribing to identify at-risk patients and work with them to review pain management strategies and address potentially harmful combinations of prescribed medication.

Scotland has one of the highest rates of opioid-related overdose mortality in Europe, with the rates of fatal overdose continuing to increase. These overdoses mainly occur among users of illicit opioids such as heroin, however, individuals who are prescribed opioids for clinical reasons can also have increased Prescription Opioid Overdose Risk (POOR). Of the 1264 drug-related deaths in 2019, opioids were implicated in 1092 (86%) including prescribable opioids such as methadone, buprenorphine, and codeine/dihydrocodeine.

The paper '[Quantifying prescribed high dose opioids in the community and risk of overdose](#)' was published in the journal BMC Public Health

Ends



The voice of nursing in the UK

RCN research and innovation

The RCN is developing a new research and innovation strategy, during which time this bulletin will be taking a break.

The research section of the RCN website contains information and resources on using and developing research to transform patient care.

[Discover more](#)



Develop research capability

Nurses looking to develop their research capability may find this listing of UK postgraduate research training opportunities useful.

Cancer research

The Wales Cancer Research Centre annual conference for nurses and allied health professionals takes place online on 23 September.

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Nursing professoriate

The RCN maintains a listing of nurses and midwives who hold substantive chairs (either personal or organisational) in UK universities. Please help us to keep the list up to date.

[View the list](#)

Research careers

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Research Design Service (RDS) South East has compiled a handy guide for anyone considering applying for an NIHR fellowship.

[Read the guide](#)

RCN publications

RCN publications cover a wide range of topics varying from clinical guidance to employment relations issues to advice on bullying. Recent publications include:

- [Modern Ward Rounds: Executive Summary and Recommendations.](#)
- [Bladder and Bowel Care in Childbirth.](#)
- [Skin Disease Competency Framework.](#)
- [Clinical Imaging Requests from Non-Medically Qualified Professionals.](#)
- [RCN Quality Assurance Framework: Developing a Programme Framework.](#)

Visit the RCN website for the full range of RCN publications.

[See more](#)

Royal College of Nursing Research Bulletin

Research funding

The RCN maintains a listing of research funding opportunities from charities and UK Government agencies that are open to nurse or midwife researcher applications.

[Find funding](#)

COPD exacerbation

The James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership (PSP) for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) flare-ups has published their top 10 research priorities.

[See the priorities](#)

Nursing research matters

This collection of research studies demonstrates the impact and contribution that nurses have made to describing, characterising and explaining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients, the public, health and care providers, and the profession.

[Take a look](#)

Patient and public involvement

The NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) South London has launched an involvement strategy, co-designed with patients, service users, carers, research staff and members of the public. It sets out how the ARC will involve the public in its work.

[Find out more](#)

RCN events

The RCN runs seminars, workshops and conferences throughout the year. Hear about professional nursing issues from expert speakers, exchange ideas with colleagues, and learn about the latest research and innovation in your area of practice.

- [The Politics of Nursing History: Identities and Boundaries](#), 29 June.

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- [RCN Critical Care Response to COVID-19: An International Perspective](#), 10 July.
- [The Future of Nursing History: Race, Gender and Internationalism](#), 14 July.
- [Learning Disability Nursing Celebration Event](#), 21 July.
- [RCN School Nurses Conference](#), 24 August.
- [RCN International Nursing Research Conference](#), 7-9 September.

Alternatively, visit the RCN events pages for full information about the wide ranging programme of activities.

[RCN events](#)

Research careers

In this guest blog from the Council of Deans of Health, Professors Priscilla Harries, Vanora Hundley and Sue Latter talk about the importance of researcher cultures and career development.

[Read the blog](#)

Research impact

The new NIHR guide to impact toolkits brings together tools and other practical resources currently available that anyone involved in research can use to plan, deliver and/or assess impact.

[Find out more](#)

❖ R&D Education Programme

“Preparing a Scientific Poster”

Date: Thursday 29 th July	Date: Thursday 30 th September
Time: 9.30 – 12.30	Time: 9.30 – 12.30
Venue: Microsoft Teams	Venue: Microsoft Teams

Poster presentations are an increasingly common aspect of academic conferences and research seminars, providing a vehicle for presenting work to peers and initiating discussion. Maximising the impact of a poster presentation is dependent upon clear representation of what is often complex and detailed information.

This 3-hour workshop provides an overview of the key issues of effective poster design and the methods available for poster production. It will also provide the opportunity for the preparation of a poster for discussion / critique within the workshop. Designed to provide participants with a greater understanding of the effective planning processes that will help them produce powerful poster displays, the session will cover:

- *When and where to use a poster*
- *Issues to consider when producing a poster*
- *Effective layouts – content, text, size, colour & graphics*
- *Production techniques and support available*
- *Group exercise – producing a poster*
- *Hints & tips on producing the perfect poster and common mistakes*
- *Gain an awareness of the resources available to help develop skills and knowledge*

Places can be booked via roy.halliday@nhs.scot



Research Bulletin - June 2021 (Issue 64)

Following the launch of the bold and ambitious vision for [The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery](#) earlier this year, detailed [implementation plans have now been published](#).

NHS Research Scotland and Chief Scientist Office of Scottish Government have worked closely with partners across the UK to develop these plans and begin to turn the UK vision for clinical research delivery into a reality. Scottish Government Health Secretary Humza Yousaf said:

"Scotland has a long history of pioneering health research and through NHS Research Scotland and the Chief Scientist Office of Scottish Government we are committed to working with our partners across the UK to create a more innovative and resilient research environment that will ultimately improve patients' lives. The plan we have launched today recognises the importance of collaboration and cross border working, ensuring the UK is a cohesive and streamlined location to attract, and undertake, research in a global economy."

The Future of UK Clinical Research Delivery

Saving and improving lives

Department of Health & Social Care

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

HSC Health and Social Care

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

[The plans](#) set out the tangible steps being taken to secure a clinical research ecosystem which capitalises on innovation, is resilient in the face of future healthcare crises and benefits all patients across the UK.

Also this month, Professor David Crossman features on [Holyrood podcast](#), discussing COVID-19 research, Scotland's response and hopes for the future of research; the RECOVERY trial has discovered a [new COVID-19 treatment](#), NRS exhibit at the [NHS Scotland Event](#) and the [Scottish Health Awards](#) have now launched.

[The COVID-19 pages](#) on the NRS website continue to be updated, and as always, your ideas, feedback and contributions are welcome.



❖ NHS Scotland Research Bulletin



Politically Speaking: COVID-19 and Clinical Trials
Holyrood's Jenni Davidson talks to Professor David Crossman, about Scotland's contribution to COVID research and the future of medical research in this country. [Listen now](#)



RECOVERY trial: Monoclonal antibody treatment
A new monoclonal antibody combination can help save lives of hospitalised patients with severe COVID-19 who were unable to generate an antibody response of their own before beginning treatment. [Read more](#)



NHS Scotland Event 2021
Scotland's leading health event takes place virtually from 22 - 23 June. Focussed on efforts to Re-mobilise, Recover, Re-design, NHS Research Scotland have a spotlight session, posters and virtual exhibition. If you miss out resources will be made available online post event. [Read more](#)



Scottish Health Awards 2021
The Scottish Health Awards, run in partnership with NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government, have been launched. The awards ceremony will take place on 4 November with NHS Research Scotland sponsoring the Innovation category. [Read more](#)



Scottish Seedcorn Fund for Neurological Research
The Chief Scientist Office and the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust have provided funds for 'seedcorn grants' to enable researchers to test innovative ideas related to neurodegenerative or neurodevelopmental conditions. [Read more](#)



Newsletter—June 2021

Welcome to our monthly newsletter

Funded through the Chief Scientist’s Office, Health Innovation South East Scotland (HISES) forms part of national network created to deliver the Scottish Government’s vision to utilise the innovation process to deliver a healthier and wealthier nation for the future.

Formed through a collaboration of three NHS Boards — Borders, Fife and Lothian, with the latter taking on the role of lead host Board, HISES has a pivotal role in delivering innovative solutions to the health and social challenges, both regionally and nationally. Need to contact us? Get in touch

Innovations@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

In your news



[HISES Multi-morbidity Data SBRI Phase 1 starts!](#)

The Multi-morbidity SBRI challenge is in response to the need to improve the care for the increasing numbers of patients with multi-morbidities who are presenting at emergency departments. The innovation opportunity being the ability to better utilise existing data to then support improved clinical decision making for each patient during their time in the hospital setting. We are delighted to announce that the four shortlisted companies Red Star AI Ltd, Mediconnect Research Ltd, [MediprospectsAI Ltd](#) and [Lightweight Integration Ltd](#), started Phase 1 on 5th May 2021. [Read more](#)

❖ Health Innovation South East Scotland



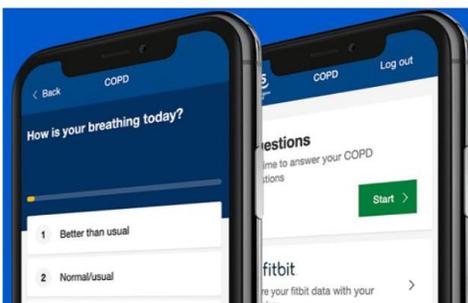
[HISES Hip Fracture Data SBRI Phase 1 starts!](#)

The Hip Fracture SBRI challenge is in response to an innovation opportunity being identified as part of the NHS Lothian Orthopaedic Quality Improvement Programme at the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh. This innovation opportunity arises from the need to understand how to better analyse and present hip fracture patients' data to then support clinical decision making that can improve the quality of care and patient outcomes. We are delighted to announce that the three shortlisted companies Red Star AI Ltd, [Lightweight Integration Ltd](#) and [Open Medical Ltd](#), start Phase 1 on 17th June 2021. [Read more](#)



[Biomedical Catalyst is back in June 2021](#)

UK registered businesses can apply for funding to develop innovative healthcare products, technologies, and processes. Total project costs must be between £250k and £4m and all projects must be SME led. The competition opens on 7th June and closes on the 26th August 2021. The Funding Information and Support Service (FISS) from Scottish Enterprise provides a dedicated team to help Scottish companies with technical innovation and R&D projects access non-Scottish Enterprise funding. If you would like to know more about how FISS could help you to apply to the Biomedical Catalyst, please follow the link to find out more. [Read more](#)



[NHS Lothian Dynamic Scot Pilot](#)

HISES are collaborating with Midlothian Community Respiratory Team on a pilot test of the Dynamic Scot COPD Digital Support Service. Patients get daily text message reminders to complete a symptom diary to help them reflect on their symptoms, track their health over time and manage their condition. The service can be accessed via a smartphone, tablet or computer. The lead clinician for the pilot has received positive feedback from the patients using the service so far. [Read more](#)



[Post-Covid AI Accelerator Demo Day](#)

The University of Edinburgh Post-Covid AI Accelerator has been launched to drive post-Covid recovery through entrepreneurship and innovation. Financed by the Scottish Funding Council through Data-Driven Innovation (DDI), with support from Nile and Scale Space, it gives data-driven AI scaleups the chance to connect their ideas to the world and have a positive impact on society. The Demo Day will showcase the 15 exciting high growth companies who have taken part in the accelerator. Join this virtual event on Thursday, 24th June to listen to the pitches and hear keynotes from leading figures in AI and tech entrepreneurship. [Read more](#)

❖ Health Innovation South East Scotland



[Latest funding opportunities](#)

Check out the latest health and care funding opportunities from across the sector on the funding section of our website.

[Read more](#)



[Connect with HISES](#)

Keep up-to-date with our latest news and follow us by [Twitter](#).

To feedback or submit content for our e-newsletter, [email us](#) before the last Friday of each month.

If you like our newsletter, share it with colleagues, friends or family who would benefit from knowing what is going on in the world of innovation in health and care.



July 2021 marks the **73rd Anniversary of the National Health Service** and offers the opportunity for staff, patients and the public to mark the past 73 years and to look forward to the needs of future generations and what health and care will look like in the future.

Looking to the future, **SHIL will launch its latest innovation call** later this month, encouraging health and social care to come up with innovative ideas to address the growing problem of frailty. The call will be open across the country and build upon [previous successful innovation calls](#) that harness the talent and expertise of health and social care professionals across Scotland.

Also this month the [Scottish Health Awards](#) have launched including the SHIL-sponsored innovation category; NHS Grampian Innovation Hub will host the upcoming National Innovation Event – Igniting Innovation; and if you missed out sessions, ePosters and virtual exhibition materials are available from the [NHS Scotland event](#).

We hope you enjoy this issue of INSIGHT. As always we develop our publications based on your feedback, so please get in touch via info@shil.co.uk and don't forget to follow [@ScotHealthInno](#) for daily health innovation news and insight.



Igniting Innovation, the latest virtual national innovation event, will be on 25 August hosted by NHS Grampian Innovation Hub. The event will explore the role of innovation test beds, and consider what is needed to deliver innovation into health and social care services, showcase success, and encourage collaboration across the community [Read more](#)



The **Scottish Health Awards** have launched this month. Nominations are now open for each of the categories, including SHIL-sponsored innovation category. The finalists for each category will be announced on 4 October and all winners will be announced at the awards ceremony which will take place on Thursday 4 November. [Read more](#)

NHS Scotland Event 2021

22 to 24 June 2021

SHIL exhibited and presented ePosters at this year's **NHS Scotland Event**, which took place from 22 - 24 June. The sessions, ePosters and virtual exhibition materials are available to all registered delegates for the next four weeks for anyone who missed it. [Read more](#)



July 2021 marks the **73rd Anniversary of the National Health Service**. The Anniversary offers the opportunity for staff, patients and the public to mark the past 73 years and to look forward to the needs of future generations and what health and care will look like in the future. [Read more](#)