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Letter to the editor

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## Preferences for Buprenorphine/Naloxone (Suboxone®) and Buprenorphine (Subutex®) in Patients Receiving Buprenorphine Maintenance Therapy in France: A Prospective, Multicentre Study

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**TO THE EDITOR:** We report the results of a multicentre study on the distribution of preferences for buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone®) and buprenorphine (Subutex®) in patients receiving buprenorphine maintenance therapy in France.

**Background and objectives** – A combination formulation of buprenorphine (Suboxone®) containing buprenorphine and naloxone in a 4:1 ratio is now available throughout Europe and many other countries worldwide. Patients previously receiving maintenance therapy with buprenorphine alone (Subutex®) can be transitioned to Suboxone® as part of a global effort to reduce the potential for non-medical use and diversion of buprenorphine. This study evaluated the distribution of preferences between these two formulations in stabilized buprenorphine-maintained patients who were subsequently switched directly to buprenorphine/naloxone.

**Methods** - A prospective, open-label, multicentre comparative trial using an intent-to-treat (ITT) study design was implemented in France. It included adult opioid-dependent patients who had been receiving buprenorphine for at least 6 months at a stable dose (2 to 16 mg/d). Buprenorphine was given at the patient's cur-

rent dose on Days 1 and 2, followed by a direct switch, with the same dose, to buprenorphine/naloxone on Days 3-4-5. Visual analogue scales (0 = worst, 10 = best score) were used by patients to rate the satisfaction felt by them at taking the study drug after each dose across a range of parameters (e.g., overall rating, taste, dissolution time, tablet size). Preference ratings for the two formulations in the ITT population were calculated using covariance analysis ( $p = 0.05$ ).

**Results** – Fifty-three patients (15F/38M; mean age:  $39 \pm 8.6$  years) were included. Overall satisfaction with the tablets was high and similar for buprenorphine and buprenorphine/naloxone ( $p = 0.130$ ); the recorded difference in mean scores was 0.4 points. Patients significantly preferred buprenorphine/naloxone with reference to tablet taste ( $p < 0.001$ , difference 4.3), size ( $p < 0.001$ , difference 1.1) and sublingual dissolution time ( $p < 0.001$ , difference 2.8). There was no preference with respect to well-being over 24 hours ( $p = 0.144$ , difference 0.4) and no significant influence of the treatment dose on any criterion. When asked directly about their preferences at the end of the study, 54% (28/52) of these patients preferred buprenorphine/naloxone, 31% (16/52) pre-

ferred buprenorphine alone and 15% (8/52) expressed no preference. Most patients (71%; 37/52) reported a wish to continue treatment with buprenorphine/naloxone. There were no safety concerns or study discontinuations associated with buprenorphine/naloxone.

**Conclusion** – Buprenorphine-stabilized patients are equally satisfied with Subutex® and Suboxone®, but prefer Suboxone® to Subutex® when it comes to tablet characteristics such as taste, size and dissolution time. Moreover, a majority of patients in this study reported a wish to continue their treatment with Suboxone®.

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#### **Contributors**

The authors contributed equally to this work

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no relevant conflict of interest to report in relation to the present study.

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