

Recent drug-related deaths in Scotland



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Pathologist's perspective



- 640 direct DRD's in our department in 2023 (55%)
- Excluded deaths – natural related to drug misuse/accidents/suicides/homicides
- As age at death increases so does natural disease
- Emerging trends

Nitazenes



HEROIN	1
FENTANYL	50
METONITAZENE	50
PROTONITAZENE	100
ISONITAZENE	250
ETONITAZENE	500

Nitazenes



- First in February 2023
- 30 deaths to date
- 4 in first 6 months of 2023
- 14 over full year
- 16 in first 6 months of 2024
- All poly-drug use

Nitazene deaths 2024



- 14 male, range 21 – 67 years, median age 43 years
- 2 female, 42 and 56 years
- Natural disease implicated in 5 cases
- 10 Glasgow area
- 3 Hamilton
- 1 Kilmarnock
- 1 Dumbarton
- 1 Dumfries

Drugs implicated



- All were metonitazene or protonitazene, 11 both
- Heroin in 14 cases
- Illicit benzodiazepine in 11 cases (10 bromazolam, 1 clonazolam, 1 etizolam)
- Cocaine in 8 cases
- Xylazine in 5 cases
- Methadone in 4 cases

Xylazine



- Non-opioid animal tranquilizer
- Slows heart rate and breathing and lowers blood pressure
- Skin lesions

Xylazine



- First case in July 2023
- 1 case in first 6 months of 2023
- 6 in total in 2023
- 6 in first 6 months of 2024, only 1 without a nitazene implicated (heroin, bromazolam and alprazolam present)

Fentanyl



- Opioid analgesic
- 2 cases in 2023, both patients prescribed fentanyl, no history of drug misuse
- 3 cases so far in 2024, all prescribed fentanyl, no history of drug misuse

Benzodiazepines



- Almost ubiquitous
- Diazepam
- Phenazepam
- Etizolam

Benzodiazepines



Drug	Jan-June 2023	All 2023	Jan-June 2024
Etizolam	73	123	35
Bromazolam	128	272	127
Alprazolam	7	15	6
Clonazolam	2	7	9
Gidazepam	0	1	6

Clonazepam



- Synthesized in 1971 but not licensed for medicinal use, no known safe dose
- Highly potent, enhanced sedation, amnesia
- First death in 2021, 43 that year
- 10 in 2022
- ?? On the rise, 9 so far this year

Gidazepam



- Desalkylgidazepam
- 4 cases in December 2022
- 1 in 2023
- 6 so far 2024
- Selectively anxiolytic
- Long half-life

Cocaine deaths



- 293 cases in 2023
- 142 cases in first 6 months of 2023
 - 89% with opiate/opioid/illicit BZD
- 123 cases in first 6 months of 2024
 - 79% with opiate/opioid/illicit BZD



Questions?