

# **iCARE: preliminary findings of a qualitative study on treatment experiences of substance users in primary care**

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** The UK is the fourth country in Europe with the highest prevalence of substance use. One in five individuals enter the treatment system via primary care services, which are the second commonest setting to manage substance use. However, little is known about the experiences of substance users when receiving substance use treatment in primary care.

**Methods:** A qualitative study was conducted across the UK in primary care. Twenty-four male and female service users in opioid substitution treatment were interviewed about their treatment experiences based on the Critical Incidents Interview protocol. This aims to explore positive and negative events which have been significant during treatment. Interviews were audio-recorded and explored via a Thematic Analysis approach.

**Results:** Service users reported aspects of their treatment in relation to how they interact with primary care services and health professionals. When it comes to the service, aspects such as location, familiarity, flexibility and availability to book appointments were highlighted as aspects that can have either a positive and negative impact. As for their interaction with health professionals, aspects such as feeling understood, professionals' willingness to listen, feeling valued as a human being were reported as key to treatment.

**Discussion:** Service users' perspectives were in line with clinical guidelines and literature reinforcing the role of patient-professional relationships in treatment success. Further work should be carried out to better support primary care professionals in engaging with substance users, as there is little information about how therapeutic relationships can be defined and improved in these settings.

## **Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)**

PPI advice was sought at the research proposal stage, as well as at the key stages of the project including ethics approval and preparation of materials for data collection. We are currently in the process of seeking PPI input on the study findings, to understand if the themes and sub-themes extracted from interviews reflect the patient experience.