

# It's Time to Review:

## Contribution of Prescription Medications to Emergency Department Overdose Presentations

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### Background

In the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 4.8% of Australians used pharmaceuticals for non-medical purposes in the last 12-months, an increase from 3.8% in 2004. Harmful drug use including overdose continues to be a serious public health issue. In 2016 there were 1808 drug induced deaths in Australia, with 1387 additional deaths where drugs contributed. The current profile of drug induced deaths is most commonly middle-aged males accidentally overdosing on prescription medications.

### Aims

To investigate:

1. If legal pharmaceuticals or illicit drugs contribute more to Emergency Department (ED) Overdose Presentations
2. Which prescription medications contribute to ED Overdose Presentations
3. Whether ED Overdose Presentations due to over-the-counter codeine products have decreased since rescheduling to S4.

### Method

ED Overdose Presentations for a 12-month period from July 2017 in a large metropolitan hospital were retrospectively analysed for sex, drug(s) involved and intention. This 12-month period included 7-months prior and 5-months post rescheduling of codeine products.



### Results

There were 112 ED Overdose Presentations during the 12-month study period, 61 were female and 68% were intentional overdoses. The contributing substances can be seen in figures one, two and three.

Codeine was involved in six ED Overdose Presentations, four occurred prior to rescheduling.

**Overdose Presentations: Substances by Class**

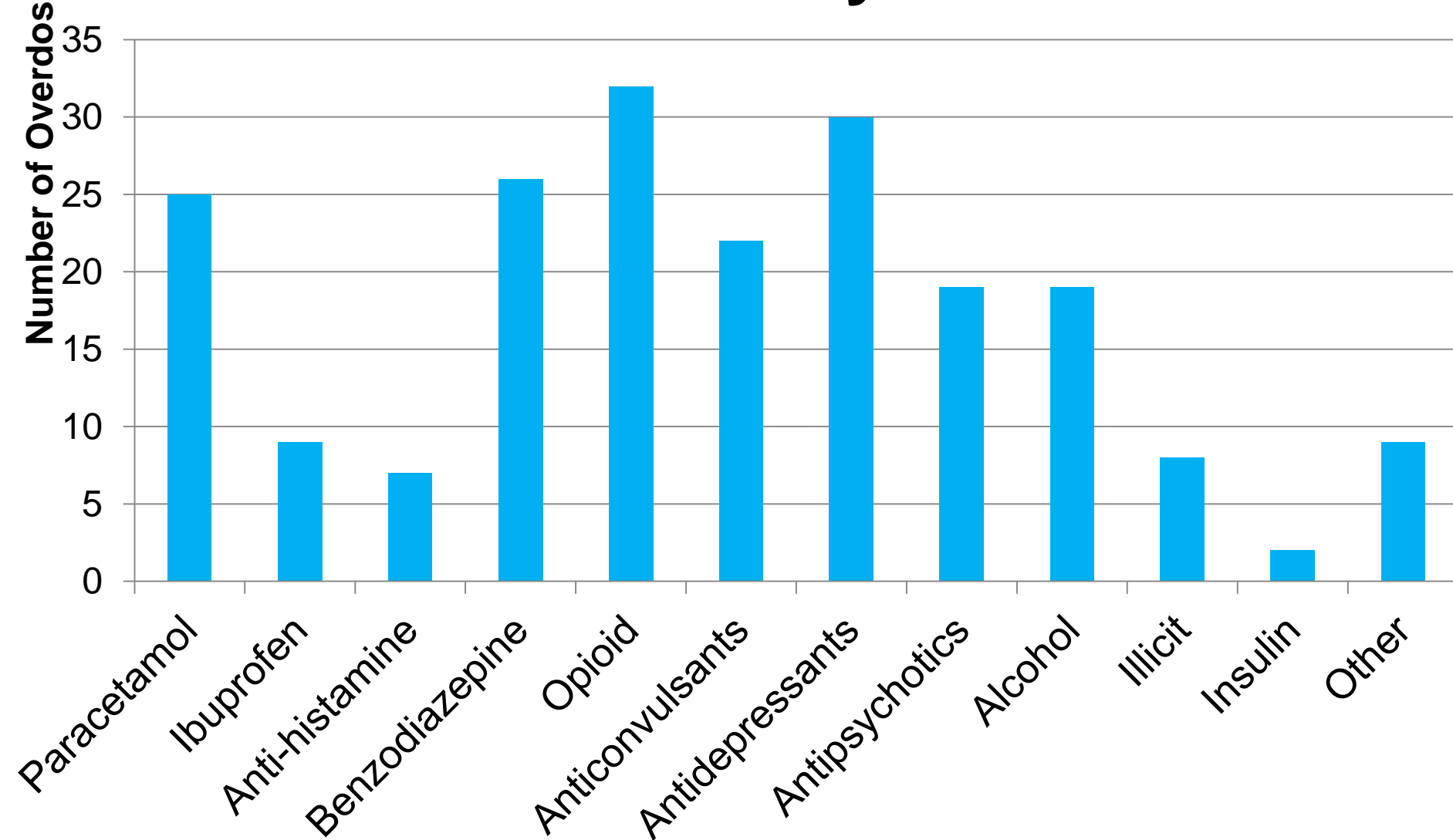


Figure One: Number of Wyong Hospital ED Overdose Presentations by contributing substance class in a 12 month period

**Percentage of Substances Contributing to Overdose**

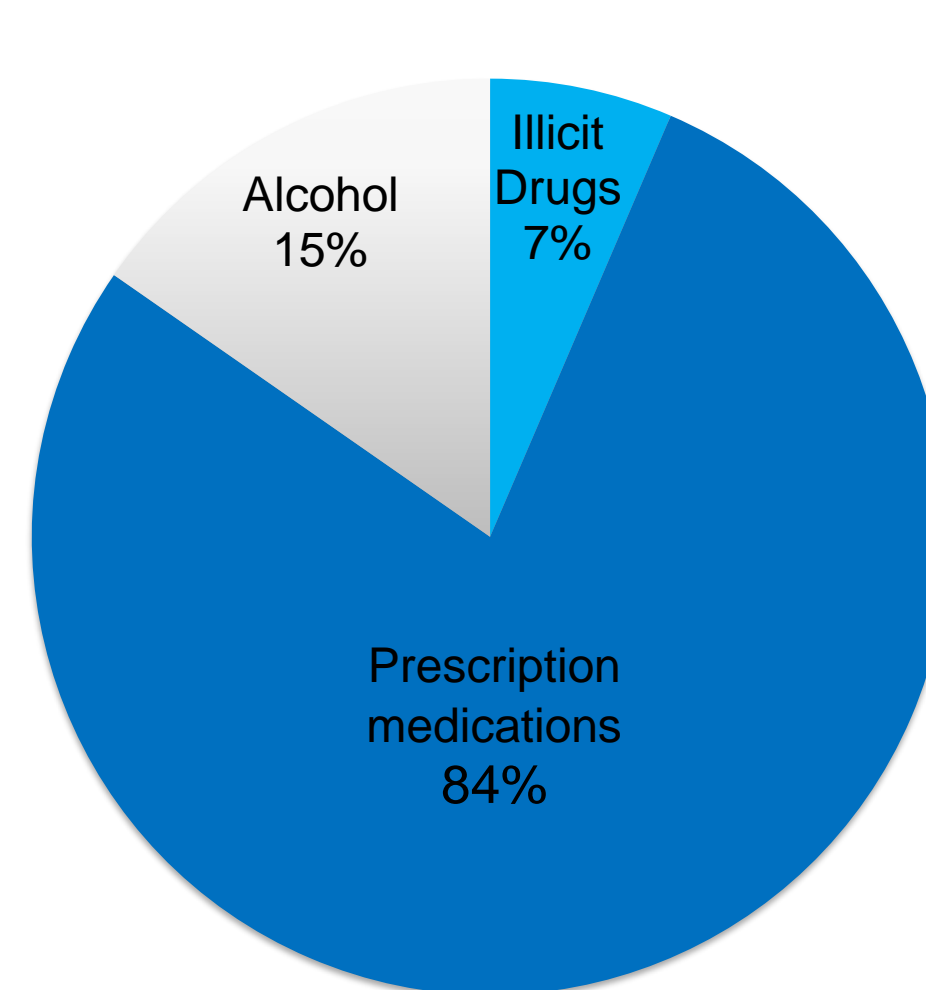


Figure Two: Percentage of Substances contributing to Overdose Presentations at Wyong Hospital ED over a 12 month period

**Most Common Prescription Medications Contributing to Overdose**

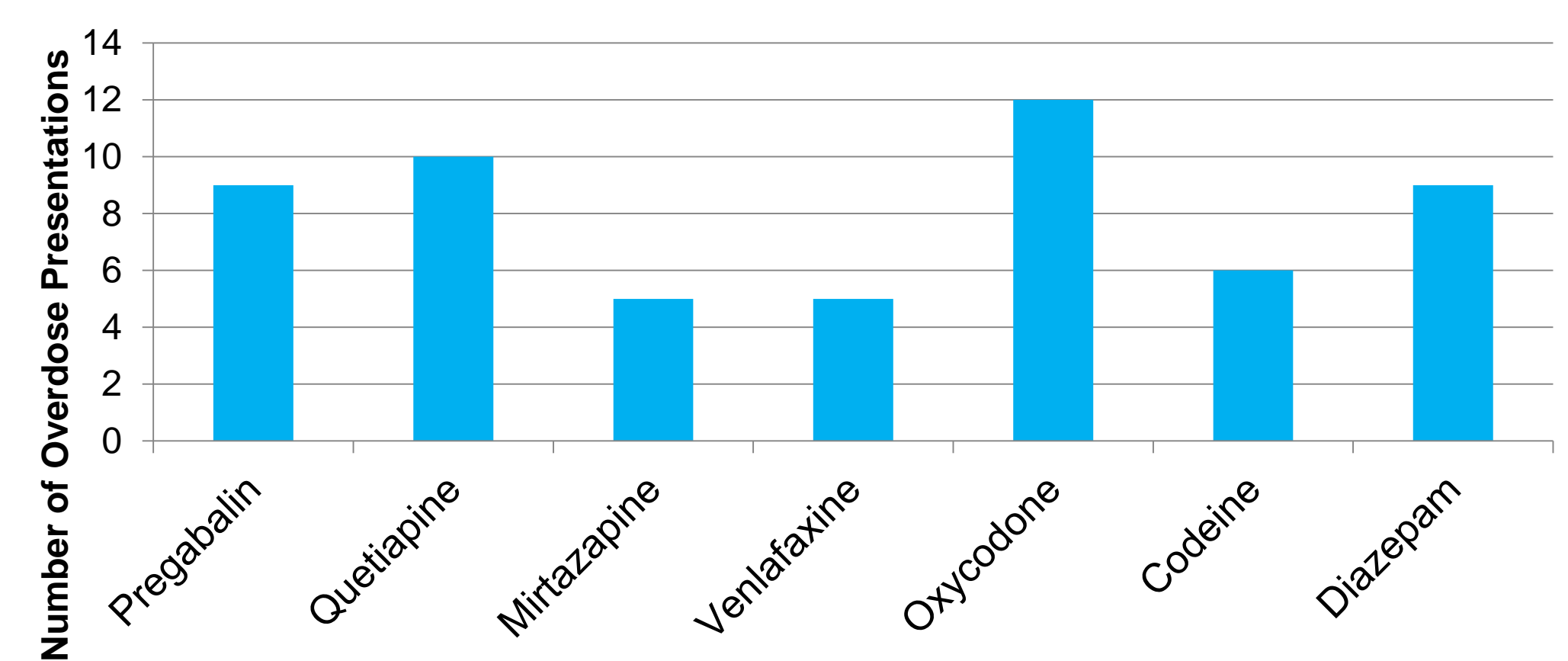


Figure Three: Most common prescription medication contributing to Wyong Hospital ED Overdose Presentations in a 12 month period



### Conclusion

ED Overdose Presentations were far more likely to involve prescription medications than illicit drugs. The profile of presentations were more commonly female with intentional overdose which differs from that of the national profile of drug induced deaths.

There has been a modest decrease in presentations involving codeine however further investigation is required to determine the effect of codeine rescheduling on ED Overdose Presentations.

Considering their contribution to presentations (84%), further research into interventions to prevent prescription drug overdoses has the potential to reduce future drug overdose presentations.

### References

National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: Detailed findings [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)