

Statistics on pharmaceuticals 2017

The total prescription of opioids decreases, both measured as proportion of patients and in dosage levels. The prescription of antiepileptic drugs increases. Direct-Acting Oral AntiCoagulants have replaced warfarin as the most common drug for prevention and treatment of blood clots. The statistics also show that more elderly people receive cholesterol lowering statins.

The prescription of opioids decreases

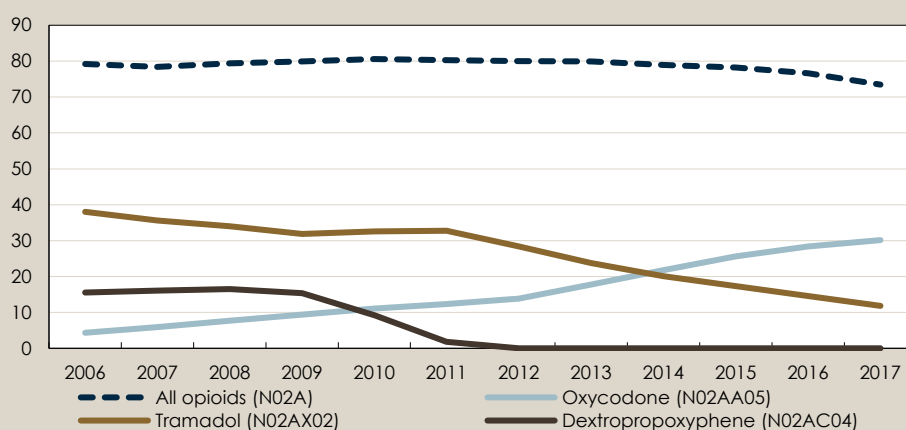
Opioids are substances that work through the central nervous system that are primarily used for pain relief. More than 7 percent of the population were prescribed an opioid at least once 2017, 57 percent of these were women and 43 percent men.

Figure 1 shows that the prescription of opioids measured as patients per 1,000 inhabitants has gone down slightly since 2010. However, this tells us nothing about changes in dosage levels. The defined daily dose per inhabitant and day for opioids have gone down by almost 30 percent from 2006 to 2017.

There are several different kinds of opioids and it is important to look at opioid prescription in total. Increases in certain substances often affect the prescription of other substances in the same drug category. The substance dextropropoxyphene was for example phased out in 2011 because of high mortality. Even before this warning reports regarding this substance had led to lowered prescription rates. The prescription of tramadol has also decreased since 2011. This has led to increased prescription of closely related substances, especially oxycodone.

Figure 1. Opioids 2006–2017

Number of patients per 1,000 inhabitants



Source: The Swedish Prescribed Drug Register, the National Board of Health and Welfare

Defined Daily Dose (DDD)

DDD is the assumed average maintenance dose per day for a drug used for its main indication in adults as defined by the WHO. DDD makes comparisons of drug subscriptions over time and between regions possible.

Anti-epileptic drugs increase

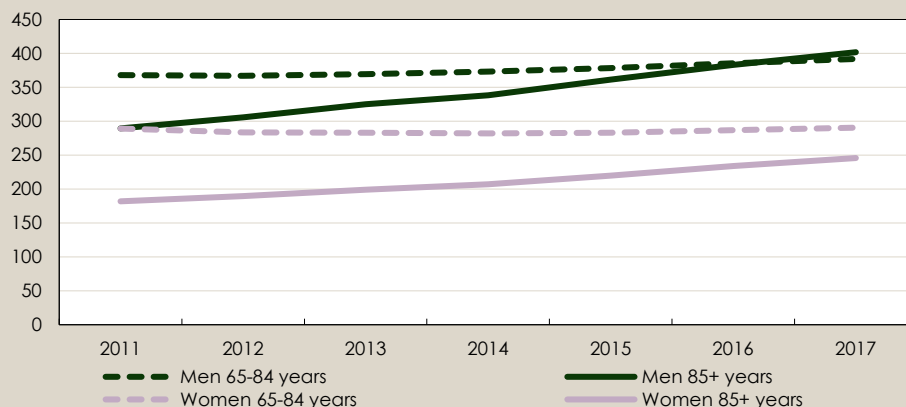
The proportion of people prescribed anti-epileptic drugs has increased from 1.5 percent in 2006 to 2.5 percent in 2017. Certain anti-epileptic drugs can be prescribed for indications other than epilepsy, for example for certain types of pain and psychiatric conditions. An increase in the prescription of anti-epileptic drugs is not synonymous with an increase in the number of patients diagnosed with epilepsy. The increase is largest among women aged 25 to 34, where the proportion of users has more than doubled since 2006. In general the proportion of users increases with age and among those aged 85 and older about 6 percent were prescribed an anti-epileptic drug in 2017. In total about 250,000 people purchased an anti-epileptic drug at least once in 2017, 56 percent of them were women and 44 percent men.

An increasing number of older people are prescribed statins

About 960,000 people were prescribed at least one drug for the treatment of high blood lipids in 2017 and the vast majority were in the older age groups. Just over every third person over the age of 65 purchased these kinds of drugs sometime during this year. Statins are the most common drug group for the treatment of high blood lipids. In the age group 85 years and older the percentage of people who were prescribed statins increased year-on-year among men as well as women.

Figure 2. Statins incl. combinations (C10AA eller C10BA)

Number of patients per 1,000 inhabitants. By sex and age group



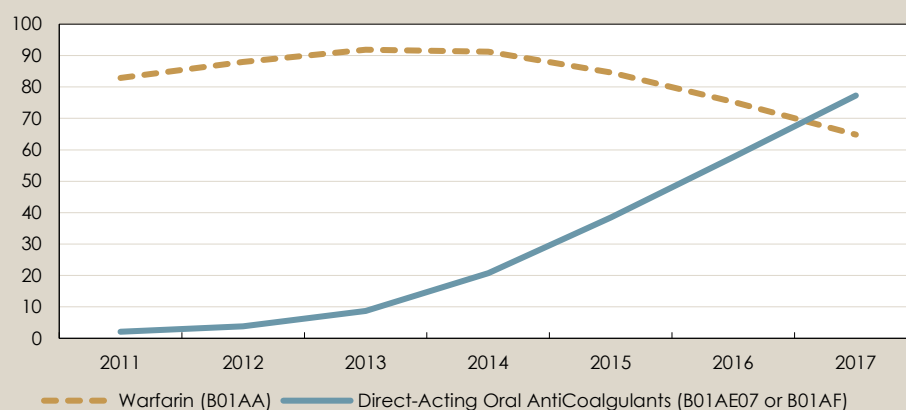
Source: The Swedish Prescribed Drug Register, the National Board of Health and Welfare

Direct-Acting Oral AntiCoagulants are now prescribed more than warfarin

The number of prescriptions of Direct-Acting AntiCoagulants (DOAC) has increased year-on-year. In 2017 the prescriptions in this group surpassed warfarin, which for a long time had a dominant role in Sweden. Nearly 8 percent of the population aged 65 years and older were prescribed a Direct-Acting Oral AntiCoagulant at least once in 2017.

Figure 3. Warfarin and Direct-Acting Oral AntiCoagulants 2011-2017

Number of patients per 1,000 inhabitants 65 years and older



Source: The Swedish Prescribed Drug Register, the National Board of Health and Welfare

The sale of prescription-free drugs increases

The total sales of prescription-free drugs have increased from 2.6 billion Swedish kronor in 2006 to 4.7 billion Swedish kronor in 2017. This amounts to an increase of more than 70 percent over this period. By comparison, total pharmaceutical sales have increased by about 40 percent in the same period. The cost of prescription-free drugs was 10 percent of total pharmaceutical sales in 2017. Painkillers and antipyretics, agents for nicotine addiction and nasal sprays are the largest groups of prescription free drugs measured in costs.

More information

You can find more tables, graphs and information in the following Excel file (in Swedish, but with an English list of terms):

www.socialstyrelsen.se/publikationer2018/2018-4-8

If you want to use our statistical database (in Swedish):

www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik/statistikdatabas/lakemedel

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