Methadone Deaths in the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

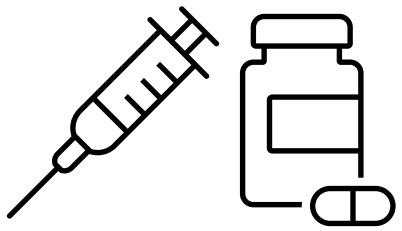
Dr Caroline Copeland

Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Medicine, King's College London

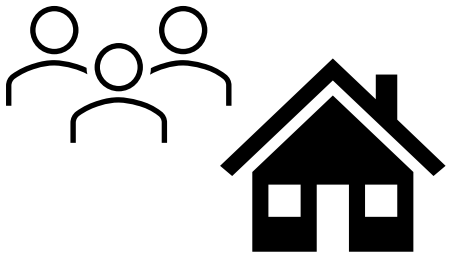
Director, National Program on Substance Abuse Deaths

KING'S College LONDON

COVID 19-Related Changes for PWUD



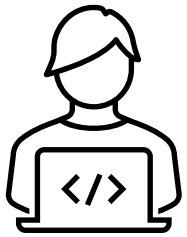
Drug Supply & Quality



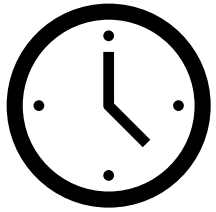
Drug-Taking Behaviours & Use Context

Barriers to Treatment & Harm Reduction

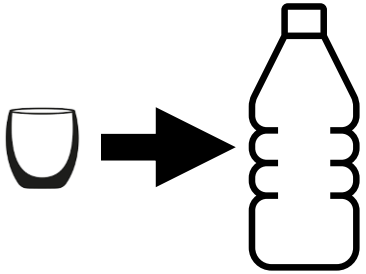
COVID 19-Related Changes for PWUD



Telemedicine



Rapid Induction of New Patients

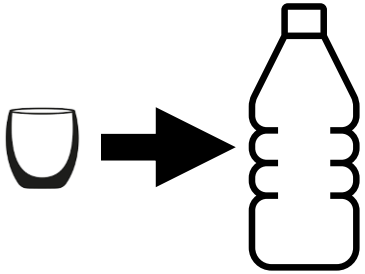


Switch to 'Take Home' Dispensing

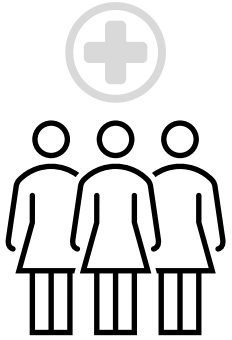
Barriers to Treatment & Harm Reduction

COVID 19-Related Changes for PWUD

Patients In Treatment



Switch to 'Take Home' Dispensing



People Not In Treatment

KING'S College LONDON

AIM

To analyse drug-related death cases due to methadone and/or buprenorphine use in the first three months of the pandemic (March 23rd – June 22nd 2020)

METHOD

To extract relevant cases from the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths (NPSAD) and data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS)

KING'S College LONDON

The National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths

- Started in 1997
- Over 48,000 cases from across the UK
- Data variables collected:
  - Decedent demographics (sex, age, ethnicity, usual address, living arrangements, occupation)
  - Cause(s) and manner of death (including toxicology reports & circumstances surrounding the death)
  - Past medical history (including prescribed medications)
- The data is **FREE** – contact me at caroline.copeland@kcl.ac.uk

KING'S College LONDON

AIM

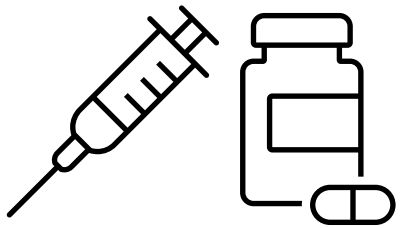
To analyse drug-related death cases due to methadone and/or buprenorphine use in the first three months of the pandemic (March 23rd – June 22nd 2020)

METHOD

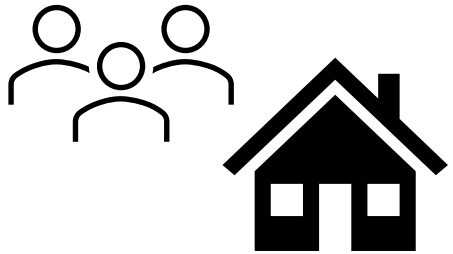
To extract relevant cases from the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths (NPSAD) and data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS)

KING'S College LONDON

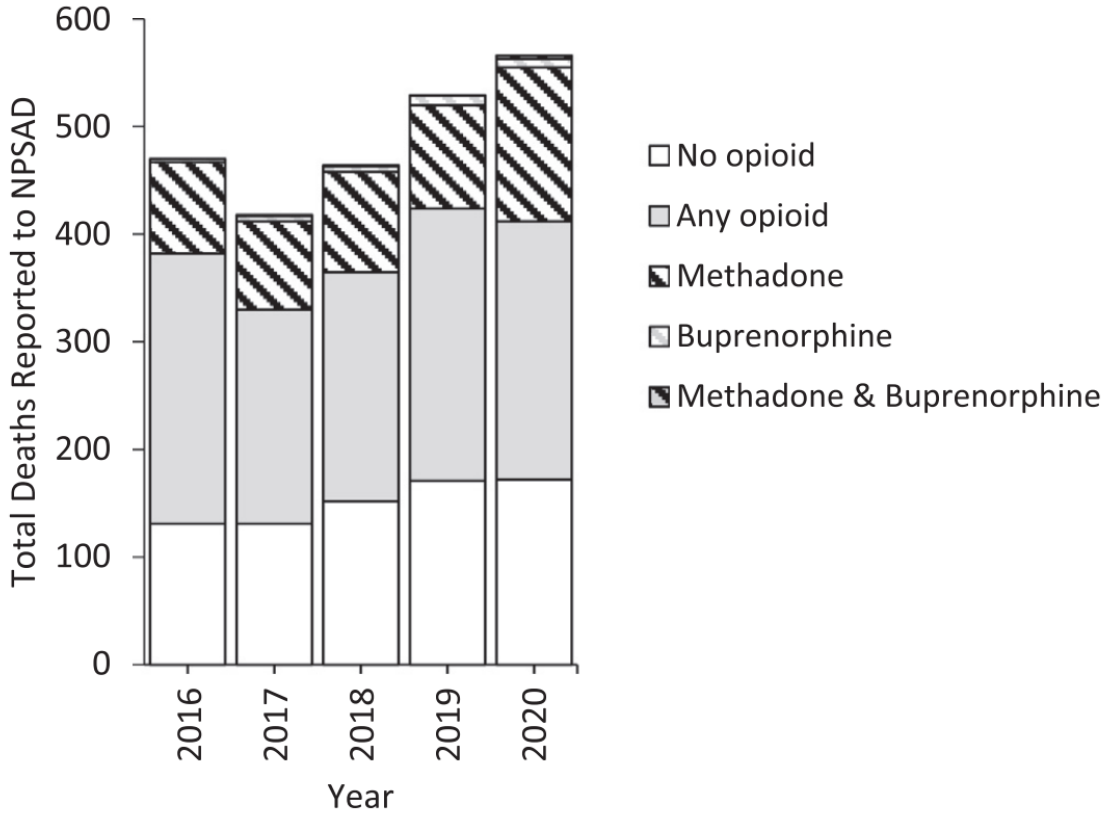
Results



Drug Supply & Quality

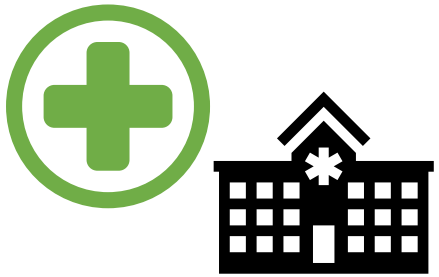


Drug-Taking Behaviours & Use Context

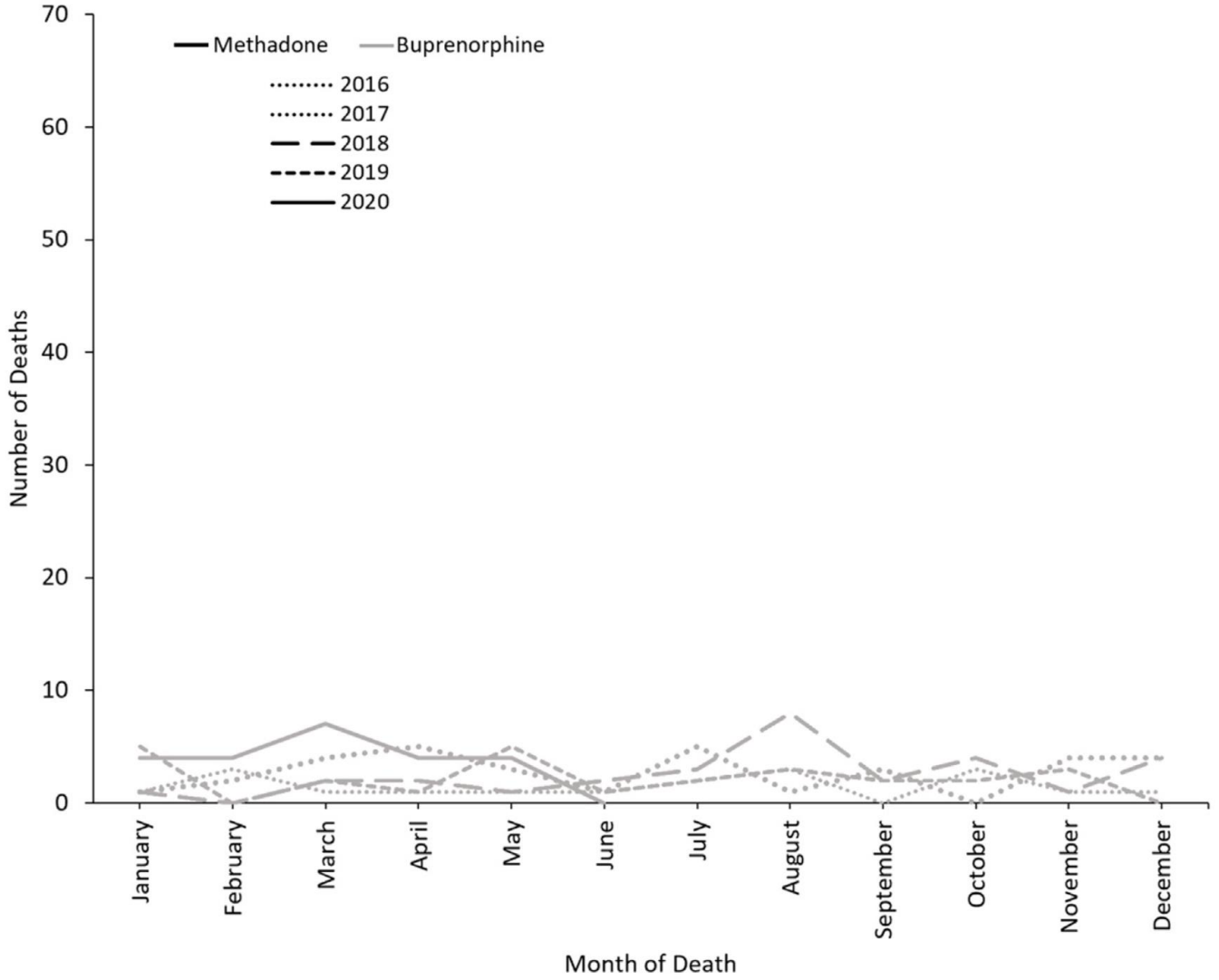


KING'S College LONDON

Results – All Methadone & Buprenorphine Deaths

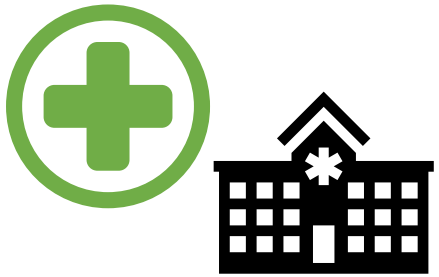


Barriers to Treatment
& Harm Reduction

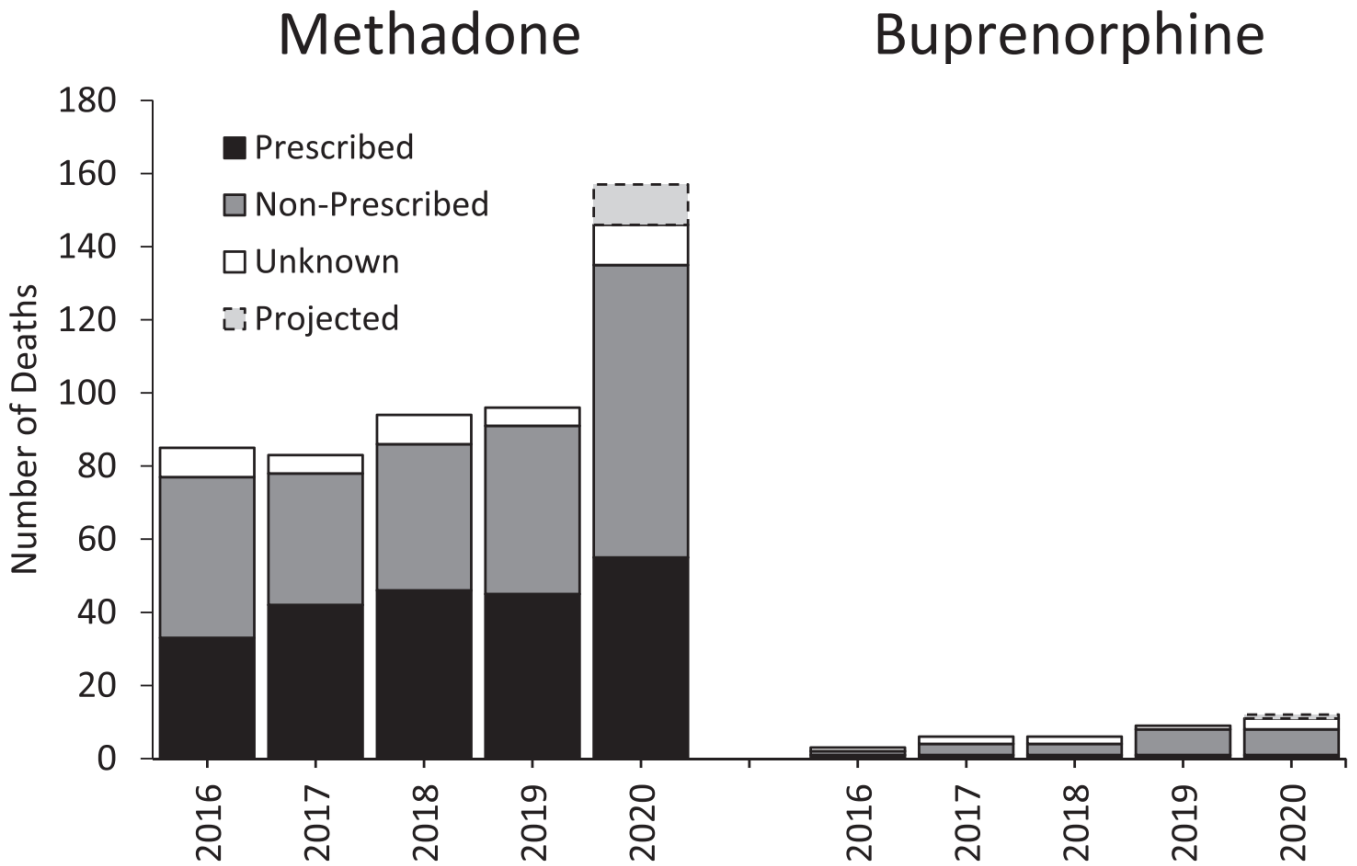


KING'S College LONDON

Results – All Methadone & Buprenorphine Deaths

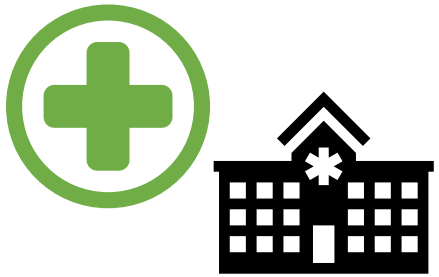


Barriers to Treatment
& Harm Reduction

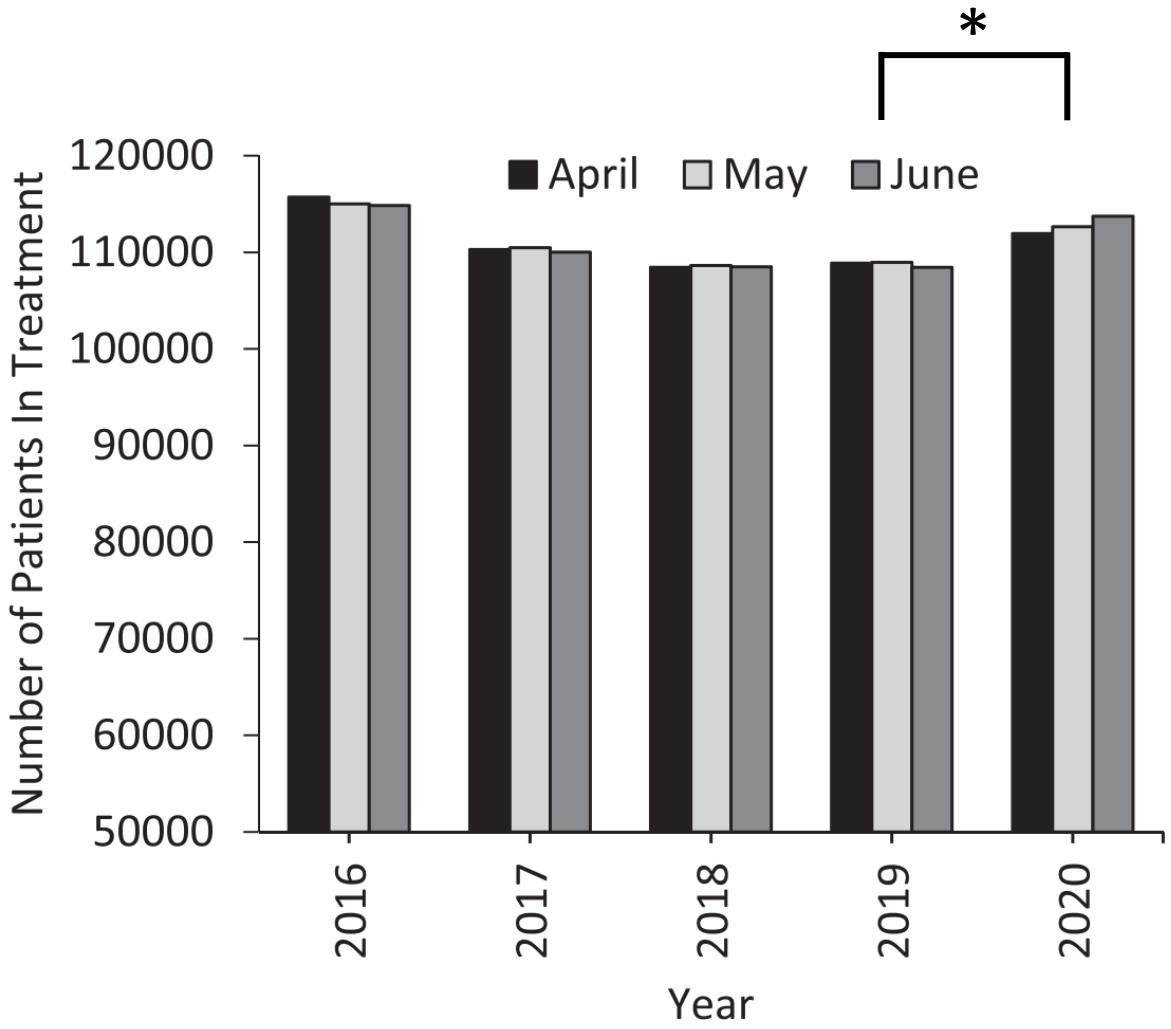


KING'S College LONDON

Results – All Patients In Treatment



Barriers to Treatment
& Harm Reduction



KING'S College LONDON

MAIN FINDING

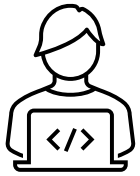
During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, methadone-related deaths in people not in treatment significantly increased by **75%**

WHY?

KING'S College LONDON

WHY?

Reduced Access to OAT?



Barriers to access technology for telemedicine?

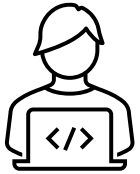
Reduced willingness to attend face-to-face appointments for fear of contracting COVID-19?

Stigma of queuing outside a pharmacy?

Reduced Harm Reduction?

Reduced provision of needle exchange services?

Reduced provision of take home naloxone?



Barriers to access technology for psychological support via telemedicine?

Reduced Healthcare Provision?

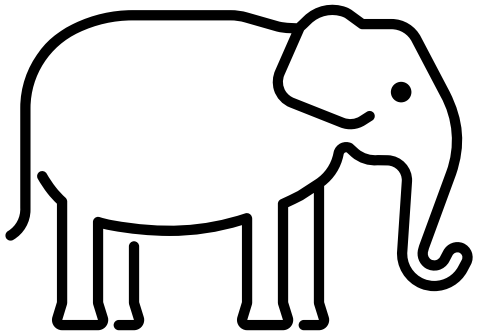
Increased response times of emergency services?

Reduced number of healthcare staff?

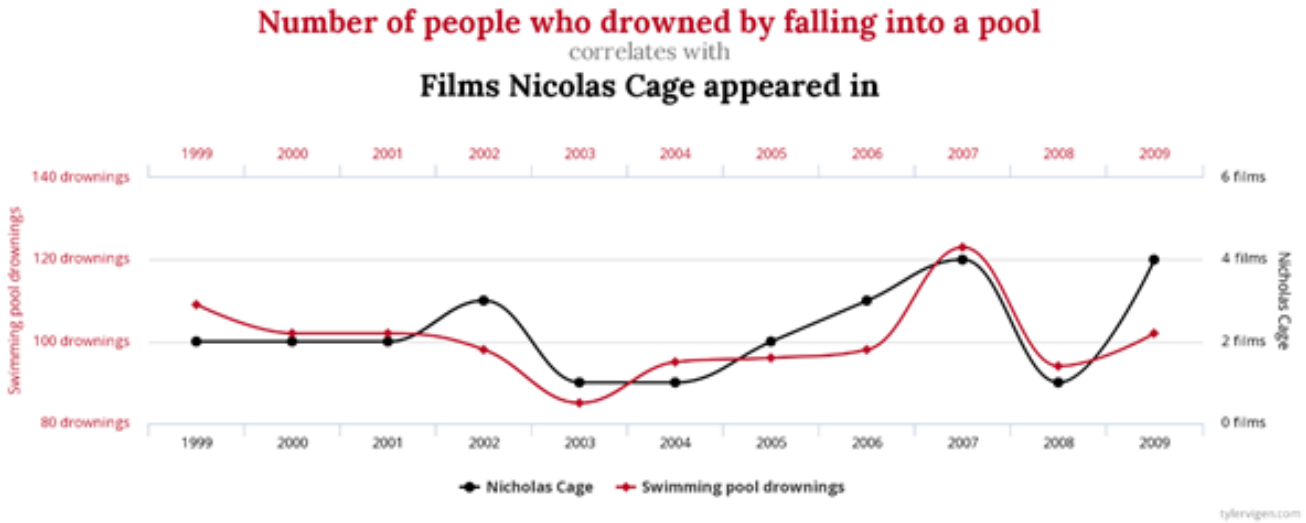
Reduced willingness to go to hospital for fear of contracting COVID-19?

KING'S College LONDON

WHY?



Diversion?!?



KING'S College LONDON

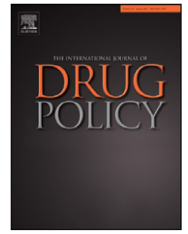
Thankyou for Listening

International Journal of Drug Policy 110 (2022) 103877

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Drug Policy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/drugpo



Research Paper

Methadone and buprenorphine-related deaths among people prescribed and not prescribed Opioid Agonist Therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic in England ☆

D Aldabergenov [a], L Reynolds [a], J Scott [b], MJ Kelleher [c,d], J Strang [c,d], CS Copeland [a], NJ Kalk [c,d,*]

KING'S College LONDON