

Prevalence of analgesic use in France, 2006-2015

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Introduction

Analgesics are the most used medicines in France; among the top 10 medicines sold in ambulatory settings, 5 are analgesic agents. It is thus particularly important to describe the prevalence of use, trends over time and characteristics of treated-patients: these were the objectives of this study, part of a larger research program on analgesic use.

Method

Annual cohorts of adult users of analgesics were identified in the *Echantillon Généraliste de Bénéficiaires* (EGB) from the French health insurance system, a representative 1/97th sample of the **French health regimen beneficiaries**, from 2006 to 2015. Analgesics were classified according to the WHO analgesic ladder. Prevalence of use for each category of analgesics and socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender) of patients treated were analysed.

Results

. The annual prevalence of analgesic use was almost stable during the study period, around 60%, but always higher in females (66.3% in 2015) (**Fig.1**).

Prevalence increased with age, from 50.8% in 18-24 years users to 65.3% in 85 years and older.

. Step I analgesics were, by far, the most used and regularly increased from 47.2% of subjects in 2006 to 55.3% in 2015 (**Fig.2**); among them, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug use decreased with age.

. The prevalence of use of Step II analgesics has decreased between 2006 and 2015 (from 26.1% to 21.3%) (**Fig.2**). This is mostly due to the withdrawal of dextropropoxyphene in 2011. The prevalence of use of the other Step II analgesics has slightly increased (**Fig.3**).

. For Step 3 analgesics, a slight increase was observed, from 0.8% in 2006 to 1.2% in 2015 (**Fig.2**); the highest prevalence of use was observed in patients aged 85 and more, with regular increase from 2.8% in 2006 to 4.8% in 2015.

Morphine was the most used (around 0.6%), followed by fentanyl (around 0.4%) and a dramatic increase was observed for oxycodone, from 0.1% in 2006 to 0.4% in 2015. Prevalences of buprenorphine and hydromorphone **were** weak (**Fig.4**) .

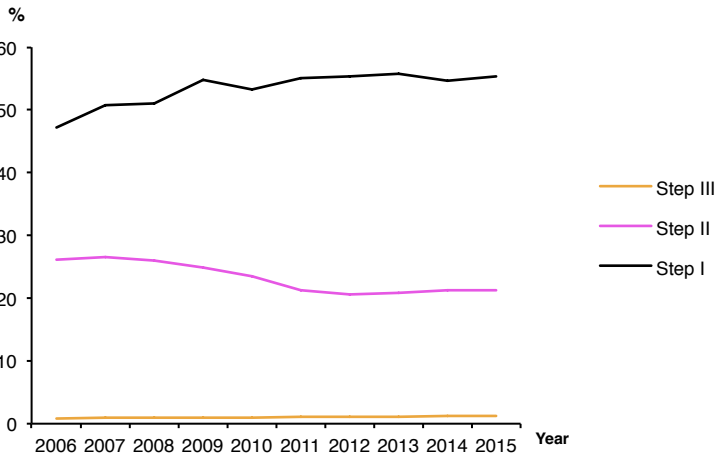


Fig.2 Prevalence of analgesic use from 2006 to 2015 by step

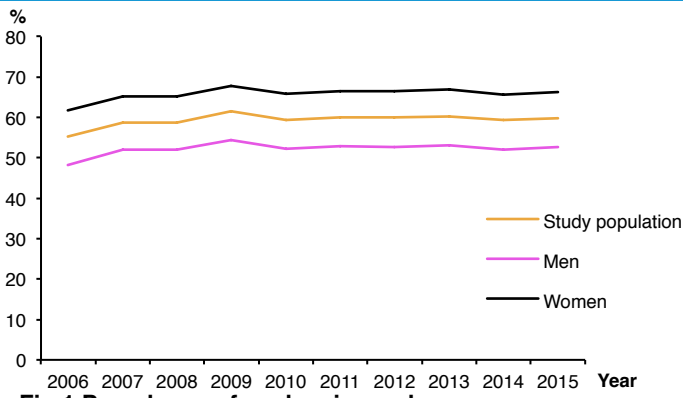


Fig.1 Prevalence of analgesic use by sex

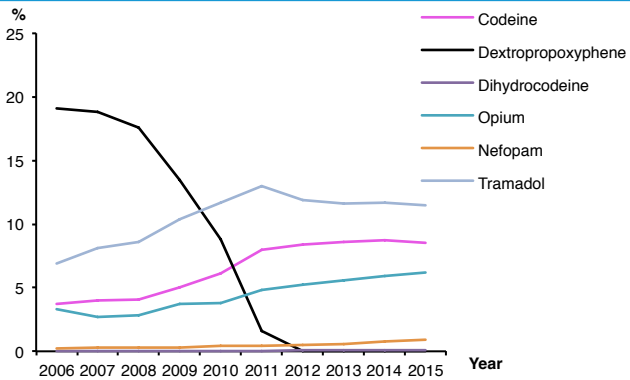


Fig.3 Prevalence of Step II analgesic use by drug

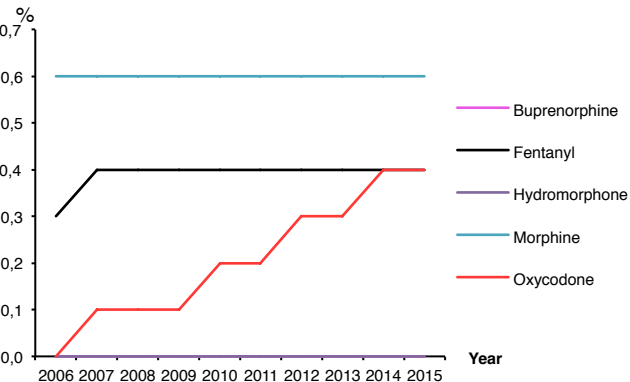


Fig.4 Prevalence of Step III analgesic use by drug

Discussion

The limits of these data are those of the EGB, as reimbursed medicines can be consumed a long time after dispensing, ever not consumed at all. However, due to the indication, this has probably a weak impact on the results, except perhaps for Step 1 analgesics.

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Furthermore, as some Step 1 analgesics are not reimbursed, this can underestimate the prevalence. **Nevertheless**, our results give an overview of analgesic use in the adult population in France, of the distribution of use for each category and of some characteristics of treated-patients.