
OPIOID MAINTAINED SUBJECTS
AND THE EFFECTS OF HIGH DOSE MORPHINE
AND ADJUVANT ANALGESICS

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Publications and Presentations in Support of This Thesis	v
Abbreviations, prefixes and symbols	viii
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Pain	3
1.2. Classification of pain	3
1.3. Pain transmission	4
1.4. Pain modulation mechanisms	4
1.4.1. Spinal mechanisms of pain modulation	4
1.4.1.1. Large fibre inhibition	4
1.4.1.2. Opioid inhibition	4
1.4.2. Supraspinal mechanisms of pain modulation	4
1.4.3. Other forms of pain modulation	5
1.4.4. Developments in our understanding of pain	5
1.4.4.1. Neuroimaging and pain	5
1.5. Treatment of pain	6
1.6. A brief history of opioids	7
1.6.1. The Ebers Papyrus and Theophrastus	7
1.6.2. Paracelsus and Laudanum, Coleridge and De Quincy	7
1.6.3. John Jones, George Young, addiction and withdrawal	8
1.6.4. Discovery of morphine and cures for ‘morphinism’	9
1.6.5. The hypodermic needle	9
1.6.6. Diacetyl morphine	9
1.6.7. The Narcotics Clinics 1918 to 1922	10

1.7.	Brief history of methadone, buprenorphine and LAAM maintenance	10
1.8.	Opioid pharmacology	11
1.8.1.	Mu, kappa and delta receptors.....	11
1.8.2.	mRNA splicing and allelic variants	13
1.8.3.	Intracellular events following mu opioid reception	13
1.8.4.	Endogenous opioid peptides.....	14
1.9.	Opioid Pharmacodynamics	15
1.10.	Opioid pharmacokinetics	16
1.10.1.	Absorption and distribution	16
1.10.2.	Metabolism	17
1.10.3.	Excretion	17
1.11.	Methadone and buprenorphine pharmacology.....	18
1.11.1.	Methadone pharmacology	18
1.11.1.1.	Methadone pharmacodynamics	18
1.11.1.2.	Methadone pharmacokinetics	19
1.11.2.	Buprenorphine pharmacology.....	19
1.11.2.1.	Buprenorphine pharmacodynamics.....	19
1.11.2.2.	Buprenorphine pharmacokinetics	20
1.12.	Tolerance and hyperalgesia	21
1.12.1.	Tolerance.....	21
1.12.2.	Hyperalgesia	22
1.13.	Tolerance in the absence of hyperalgesia	22
1.14.	Tolerance, hyperalgesia and the opioid maintained patient.....	23
1.14.1.	Pain responses of opioid dependent subjects	24
1.14.1.1.	Martin and Inglis	27
1.14.1.2.	Ho and Dole	27
1.14.2.	Opioid dependent subjects on maintenance treatment	27
1.14.2.1.	Compton	27
1.14.2.2.	Schall	28
1.14.2.3.	Dyer	28
1.14.2.4.	Doverly.....	28
1.14.3.	Other opioid maintenance and hyperalgesia.....	29
1.14.4.	Opioid abstinence and the restoration of normal pain sensitivity.....	30

1.15. Cellular and synaptic adaptations following chronic opioid use....	32
1.15.1. NMDA receptor cascade	32
1.15.2. Spinal cord glial cells	32
1.15.3. Strategies to overcome hyperalgesia and tolerance.....	33
1.15.3.1. Recent work	33
1.16. Adjuvant analgesia pharmacology.....	35
1.16.1. S (+) –ketamine pharmacology.....	37
1.16.1.1. S (+) -ketamine pharmacodynamics	37
1.16.1.2. S (+) -ketamine pharmacokinetics.....	38
1.16.2. Tramadol pharmacology	38
1.16.2.1. Tramadol pharmacodynamics	38
1.16.2.2. Tramadol pharmacokinetics.....	39
1.16.3. Ketorolac pharmacology.....	39
1.16.3.1. Ketorolac pharmacodynamics	39
1.16.3.2. Ketorolac pharmacokinetics	40
1.17. History of pain management guidelines in opioid tolerant patients	40
1.17.1. Conventional doses of analgesics	40
1.17.1.1. Cushman (1972), Rubenstein (1976)	40
1.17.1.2. Kantor (1980), Portenoy and Payne (1997).....	41
1.17.2. Additional methadone approaches	41
1.17.2.1. Rogers (1989), Schulz (1997) and Savage (1998)	41
1.17.2.2. Scimeca et al (2000) and Manfredi et al (2001).....	41
1.17.3. Large retrospective case studies	42
1.17.3.1. De Leon-Casasola (1993).....	42
1.17.3.2. Rapp (1995).....	42
1.17.4. Smaller studies.....	42
1.18. Summary.....	44
1.19. Hypotheses.....	44
1.19.1. Study 1	44
1.19.2. Study 2	44
1.19.3. Study 3	45
1.19.4. Study 4	45

2. Methodology and subjects 46

2.1.	Introduction and study design	46
2.1.1.	Studies 1 and 2.Methadone and buprenorphine subjects plus high dose morphine studies.....	46
2.1.2.	Studies 3 and 4. Methadone and buprenorphine plus adjuvant and high dose morphine studies.....	47
2.2.	Ethical considerations	47
2.3.	Subject inclusion and exclusion criteria	48
2.3.1.	Study 1. Methadone subjects plus high dose morphine	49
2.3.2.	Study 2. Buprenorphine subjects plus high dose morphine	49
2.3.3.	Study 3. Methadone subjects plus adjuvant analgesics and high dose morphine	49
2.3.4.	Study 4. Buprenorphine subjects plus adjuvant analgesics and high dose morphine.....	50
2.3.5.	Healthy controls plus morphine.....	50
2.3.6.	Healthy controls plus adjuvant analgesics and morphine	50
2.4.	Procedure	52
2.4.1.	Drug administration	52
2.4.1.1.	Methadone and buprenorphine morphine studies.....	52
2.4.1.2.	Infusions of S-ketamine, tramadol and ketorolac.	55
2.4.2.	Blood sampling and assessment times.....	55
2.5.	Nociceptive tests and physiological responses	56
2.5.1.	Cold pressor test.....	56
2.5.2.	Electrical stimulation.....	57
2.6.	Drug Assays	57
2.6.1.	Plasma morphine, S-ketamine, ketorolac and tramadol concentrations	57
2.6.2.	Plasma buprenorphine concentrations	58
2.6.2.1.	Instrumentation.....	58
2.6.2.2.	Liquid chromatography conditions	58
2.6.2.3.	Sample preparation.....	58
2.6.2.4.	Calibration curves	59
2.7.	Data collection and statistical analysis.....	59
2.8.	Discussion.....	60
2.8.1.	Design	60
2.8.2.	Target pseudo steady-state plasma drug concentrations	61
2.8.2.1.	Morphine.....	61

2.8.2.2. Ketorolac.....	62
2.8.2.3. Ketamine	62
2.8.2.4. Tramadol	62
2.8.3. Daily dose ranges and subject numbers	62

3. Study 1. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine in methadone maintained subjects 64

3.1. Introduction	64
3.2. Methods	64
3.2.1. Subjects	64
3.2.2. Drug administration	65
3.3. Results.....	65
3.3.1. Plasma morphine concentrations	65
3.3.2. R-(-)-methadone (plasma methadone) concentrations	66
3.3.3. Cold pressor responses	68
3.3.4. Electrical stimulation.....	70
3.3.5. Respiration	72
3.3.6. Post methadone maintenance dosing	74
3.3.6.1. Cold Pressor	74
3.3.6.2. Electrical stimulation	74
3.3.7. Plasma methadone concentration and cold pressor	76
3.3.8. Adverse events	77
3.4. Discussion.....	77

4. Study 2. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine in buprenorphine maintained subjects 80

4.1. Introduction	80
4.2. Methods	81
4.2.1. Subjects	81
4.2.2. Drug administration	81
4.3. Results.....	82
4.3.1. Plasma morphine concentrations	82
4.3.2. Plasma buprenorphine and norbuprenorphine concentrations...	86
4.3.3. Cold Pressor.....	88

4.3.4. Electrical stimulation.....	90
4.3.5. Respiration rate.....	92
4.3.6. Concentrations and responses of buprenorphine and methadone subjects.....	94
4.3.7. Responses following buprenorphine maintenance dosing.....	96
4.3.8. Adverse events.....	96
4.4. Discussion.....	97

5. Study 3. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine and adjuvant analgesics in methadone maintained subjects..... 100

5.1. Introduction.....	100
5.2. Methods.....	102
5.2.1. Subjects.....	102
5.2.2. Drug administration.....	103
5.3. Results.....	104
5.3.1. Plasma S-ketamine, ketorolac and tramadol concentrations....	104
5.3.2. Plasma morphine concentrations.....	106
5.3.3. Plasma R-methadone concentrations.....	106
5.3.4. Cold pressor.....	111
5.3.4.1. S-ketamine administration day.....	111
5.3.4.2. Tramadol administration day.....	111
5.3.4.3. Ketorolac administration day.....	111
5.3.5. Electrical stimulation.....	114
5.3.5.1. S-Ketamine day.....	114
5.3.5.2. Tramadol day.....	114
5.3.5.3. Ketorolac day.....	114
5.3.6. Respiration rate.....	116
5.3.6.1. S-ketamine day.....	116
5.3.6.2. Tramadol day.....	116
5.3.6.3. Ketorolac day.....	116
5.3.7. Adverse events.....	118
5.4. Discussion.....	121

6. Study 4. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine and adjuvant analgesics in buprenorphine maintained subjects.....	125
6.1. Introduction	125
6.2. Methods	125
6.2.1. Subjects.....	125
6.2.2. Drug administration	126
6.3. Results.....	126
6.3.1.1. Plasma S-ketamine, ketorolac and tramadol concentrations	127
6.3.1.2. Plasma morphine concentrations	130
6.3.1.3. Plasma buprenorphine, norbuprenorphine concentrations .	132
6.3.2. Responses	134
6.3.2.1. Cold pressor	134
6.3.2.2. Electrical stimulation	139
6.3.2.3. Respiration rate.....	142
6.3.3. Adverse events	142
6.3.4. Methadone, buprenorphine maintained subject comparisons...	143
6.4. Discussion.....	143
7. Summary of major findings and conclusion	147
7.1. Clinical implications of research findings	148
7.1.1. Study 1. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine in methadone maintained subjects.....	148
7.1.2. Study 2. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine in buprenorphine maintained subjects	149
7.1.3. Study 3. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine and adjuvant analgesics in methadone maintained subjects	151
7.1.4. Study 4. Antinociceptive and respiratory effects of high dose morphine and adjuvant analgesics in buprenorphine maintained subjects	152
7.1.5. Comparison of methadone subjects to buprenorphine subjects	152
7.2. Strengths and limitations	153
7.2.1. Strengths	153
7.2.2. Limitations	153
7.3. Directions for future research	155
7.4. Conclusion	156

Appendix 157

- Appendix 1: Athanasos P, Smith C, White J, Somogyi A, Bochner F and Ling W. (2006) Methadone maintenance patients are cross-tolerant to the antinociceptive effects of high morphine concentrations. *Pain*. Jan; 120: 267-275 157

Bibliography 167

List of Tables

Table 1 Pain responses of opioid dependent subjects	26
Table 2 Subject demographics. MMT methadone maintenance treatment clients. BMT buprenorphine maintenance treatment clients.	51
Table 3 Loading and maintenance doses of morphine and adjuvants to achieve target pseudo steady state plasma concentration. MMT methadone maintenance treatment clients. BMT buprenorphine maintenance treatment clients.....	53
Table 4 Plasma concentrations of morphine, buprenorphine and norbuprenorphine in the buprenorphine morphine study on morphine and saline administration days in buprenorphine maintained subjects. Data are mean±SEM (range).	84
Table 5 Cold pressor and electrical responses and respiration rates for buprenorphine maintained and control subjects in the buprenorphine morphine study on morphine administration days. Data are mean±SEM (range). † P<0.05, †† P<0.01 between group; * P<0.05, ** P<0.01 between treatments.	89
Table 6 Plasma drug concentrations on S-ketamine, tramadol, ketorolac and saline administration days for control and methadone maintained subjects. Morphine administered during S-ketamine, Tramadol, Ketorolac and Saline infusions described as Morphine (Co-S-Ketamine Infusion), Morphine (Co-Tramadol Infusion), Morphine (Co-Ketorolac Infusion) and Morphine (Co-Saline Infusion). Concentrations are mean±SEM (range).	110
Table 7 Cold pressor and electrical stimulation responses, and respiration rates on S-ketamine, tramadol and ketorolac administration days for control and methadone maintained subjects. Data are mean±SEM (range). † P<0.05, †† P<0.01 between groups, * P<0.05, ** P<0.01 between treatments.	120
Table 8 Plasma drug concentrations on S-ketamine, tramadol, ketorolac and saline administration days for buprenorphine maintained and control subjects. Data are mean±SEM (range).	128
Table 9 Cold pressor and electrical stimulation responses, and respiration rates on S-ketamine, tramadol and ketorolac administration days for buprenorphine maintained and control subjects. Data are mean±SEM (range). † P<0.05 between groups, *P<0.05, ** P<0.01 between treatments.....	135

List of Figures

- Figure 1 Schematic diagram of the experimental design for studies 1 and 2. Pain was tested, respiration rate was measured and blood samples were taken at time -30 minutes, 0 and hourly thereafter. Blood samples were also taken at 0.25, 0.5 and 0.75 hours after the end of the last infusion. These additional blood sample points are not shown. 54
- Figure 2 Schematic diagram of the experimental design for studies 3 and 4. Pain was tested, respiration rate was measured and blood samples were taken at times -60 minutes, 0 and hourly thereafter. Blood samples were also taken at 0.25, 0.5 and 0.75 hours after the end of the last infusion. These additional blood sample points are not shown. 54
- Figure 3 Plasma morphine concentrations (upper panel) in 18 methadone maintained (■) and 10 healthy control participants (▲). Pseudo steady-state plasma concentration 1 (M1), pseudo-steady-state plasma concentration 2 (M2) and the time of the methadone dose administration are indicated. Plasma R-(-)-methadone concentrations (lower panel) from 0 to 310 minutes on morphine administration (▼) and saline administration days (O) in methadone subjects are indicated. The time of the methadone dose administration is also indicated. Data are represented as mean ± SEM. 67
- Figure 4 Cold pressor (upper panel) and electrical stimulation (lower panel) pain tolerance responses at baseline (B) and Morphine Infusion 2 (M2)(plasma morphine concentrations). *P<0.05, **P<0.01 compared to baseline (0 ng/ml). †††P<0.001 methadone participants versus control participants. 69
- Figure 5 Cold pressor pain tolerance (upper panel), electrical stimulation pain tolerance (middle panel) and respiration rate (lower panel) values at baseline (light grey bars) and morphine concentration 2 (M2) (dark grey bars) for daily methadone dose ranges 11-45, 46 to 80 and 81-115 mg per day. Data are represented as mean ± SEM. **P<0.01 compared to baseline..... 71
- Figure 6 Respiration rate responses at different plasma morphine concentrations, Baseline (B) and Morphine Infusion 2 (M2). Data (as mean ± SEM) are shown for methadone maintained and healthy control participants. **P<0.01 compared to baseline (0 ng/ml). ††P<0.01 methadone participants versus control participants..... 73
- Figure 7 Pain detection threshold and pain tolerance values in cold pressor (upper panel) and electrical stimulation (lower panel) immediately prior to (Pre) and 2 hours after (Post) methadone administration. Data (as mean ± SEM) were collected from methadone subjects on days when only saline was administered. *** P<0.001, * P<0.05 0 vs. 2 hours. 75

Figure 8	Linear regression analysis of plasma R-(-) methadone concentrations and cold pressor pain tolerance values at baseline on the saline administration day ($r^2=0.20$, $P=0.06$) in the 18 methadone maintained subjects. Spearman's correlation was $p=0.08$, $r=0.4$, 95% confidence intervals of -0.07 to 0.7.....	76
Figure 9	Plasma morphine concentrations in 12 buprenorphine maintained (■) and 10 healthy control subjects (▲). Pseudo steady-state plasma morphine concentration 1 (M1), pseudo-steady-state plasma morphine concentration 2 (M2) and the time of the buprenorphine dose administration are indicated (↑). Data are represented as mean ± SEM.....	85
Figure 10	Plasma buprenorphine concentrations (upper panel) at baseline (white), infusion 1 (light grey) and infusion 2 (dark grey) on morphine and saline administration days. Plasma norbuprenorphine concentrations (lower panel) at baseline (white), infusion 1 (light grey) and infusion 2 (dark grey) on morphine and saline administration days. Results are represented as mean ± SEM.	87
Figure 11	Cold pressor (upper panel) and electrical stimulation (lower panel) mean (± SEM) pain tolerance responses in 10 control and 12 buprenorphine subjects at baseline (B) and morphine infusion 2 (Morphine 2). †† $P<0.01$ between groups; * $P<0.05$; ** $P<0.01$ between treatments. Note different morphine concentrations between buprenorphine and control subjects.	91
Figure 12	Mean (± SEM) respiration rates (breaths per minute) in 10 control and 12 buprenorphine subjects at baseline and morphine infusion 2 (Morphine 2). † $P<0.05$ between groups, ** $P<0.01$ between treatments. Note different morphine concentrations between the two groups.	93
Figure 13	Mean (± SEM) Cold pressor (upper panel), electrical stimulation (middle panel) and respiration rates (lower panel) in 18 methadone (M) and 12 buprenorphine (B) maintained subjects at baseline and second morphine infusion (M2). There were no statistically significant differences between the groups at either baseline or second morphine infusion.....	95
Figure 14	Plasma S-ketamine, tramadol and ketorolac concentrations in 6 control and 6 methadone subjects at adjuvant infusion and adjuvant infusion plus morphine are shown. S-ketamine infusion (SK) and S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) (upper panel), Tramadol infusion (T) and tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) (middle panel), and Ketorolac infusion (K) and ketorolac/morphine infusion (KM) (lower panel) are indicated. Results are represented as mean ± SEM.....	105
Figure 15	Plasma morphine concentrations during S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SK), tramadol/morphine infusion (T), ketorolac/morphine infusion (K) and saline placebo/morphine infusion (S) (methadone subjects) in 6 control (upper panel) and 6 methadone subjects (lower panel) are shown. Results are represented as mean ± SEM.....	107

Figure 16 Plasma methadone concentrations in 6 methadone subjects at baseline and at adjuvant/saline placebo infusion (Adjuvant) on saline placebo (S), S-ketamine (SK), tramadol (T) and ketorolac (K) administration days are shown. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM.	108
Figure 17 Plasma methadone concentrations in 6 methadone subjects at adjuvant/saline placebo and morphine infusion (Adjuvant/Morphine) and three hours post methadone administration (Post Dose) on saline placebo (S), S-ketamine (SK), tramadol (T) and ketorolac (K) administration days are shown. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM.....	109
Figure 18 Cold pressor pain tolerance responses on S-ketamine (upper panel), tramadol (middle panel) and ketorolac (lower panel) administration days in 6 control and 6 methadone subjects at baseline (B), adjuvant (S-Ketamine (SK), Tramadol (T), Ketorolac (K)) and adjuvant/morphine (S-Ketamine and morphine (SKM), Ketorolac and morphine (KM), Tramadol and morphine (TM)) infusions. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. $\dagger\dagger P < 0.01$, $\dagger P < 0.05$ between groups, * $P < 0.05$ between treatments.....	113
Figure 19 Electrical stimulation pain tolerance responses on S-ketamine (upper panel), tramadol (middle panel) and ketorolac (lower panel) administration days in 6 control and 6 methadone subjects at baseline (B), adjuvant (S-Ketamine (SK), Tramadol (T), Ketorolac (K)) and adjuvant/morphine (S-Ketamine and morphine (SKM), Ketorolac and morphine (KM), Tramadol and morphine (TM)) infusions. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. * $P < 0.05$ between treatments.....	115
Figure 20 Respiration rates on S-ketamine (upper panel), tramadol (middle panel) and ketorolac (lower panel) administration days in 6 control and 6 methadone subjects at baseline (B), adjuvant (S-Ketamine (SK), Tramadol (T), Ketorolac (K)) and adjuvant/morphine (S-Ketamine and morphine (SKM), Ketorolac and morphine (KM), Tramadol and morphine (TM)) infusions. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. $\dagger P < 0.05$ between groups, ** $P < 0.01$ between treatments.....	117
Figure 21 Plasma S-ketamine, tramadol and ketorolac concentrations in 6 control and 6 buprenorphine subjects are shown. S-ketamine infusion (SK), S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) (upper panel), tramadol infusion (T), tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) (middle panel) and ketorolac infusion (K), ketorolac/morphine infusion (KM) are indicated. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM.....	129
Figure 22 Plasma morphine concentrations during S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SK), tramadol/morphine infusion (T), ketorolac/morphine infusion (K) and saline placebo/morphine infusion (S) (buprenorphine subjects) in 6 control (upper panel) and 6 buprenorphine subjects (lower panel) are shown. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM.	131
Figure 23 Plasma buprenorphine (upper panel) and norbuprenorphine (lower panel) concentrations at baseline, adjuvant analgesic or	

	saline infusion (Adjuvant), and adjuvant analgesic or saline/morphine infusion (Adjuvant/Morphine) on saline (white bar), S-ketamine (light grey bar), tramadol (darker grey bar) and ketorolac (darkest grey bar) administration days. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM.....	133
Figure 24	Cold pressor mean (\pm SEM) pain tolerance responses for 6 buprenorphine and 6 control subjects at respective baselines and S-ketamine infusion (SK) and S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) (upper panel), tramadol infusion (T) and tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) (middle panel), and ketorolac infusion (K) and ketorolac/morphine infusion (KM) are shown (lower panel). † P<0.05 between groups, * P<0.05 between treatments.....	136
Figure 25	The percentage changes from baseline for 6 buprenorphine subjects during S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM), tramadol/morphine infusion (TM), and 6 control subjects during S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) and tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) are shown. Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. The Y axis is in two segments to describe the extent of percentage change for control subjects during the tramadol/morphine infusion.	138
Figure 26	Electrical stimulation pain tolerance responses on S-ketamine infusion (SK) and S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) (upper panel), tramadol infusion (T) and tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) (middle panel), and ketorolac infusion (K) and ketorolac/morphine infusion (KM) are shown (lower panel). Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. * P<0.05 between treatments.....	140
Figure 27	Respiration rates on S-ketamine infusion (SK) and S-ketamine/morphine infusion (SKM) (upper panel), tramadol infusion (T) and tramadol/morphine infusion (TM) (middle panel), and ketorolac infusion (K) and ketorolac/morphine infusion (KM) are shown (lower panel). Results are represented as mean \pm SEM. † P<0.05 between groups, ** P<0.01 between treatments.....	141

Abstract

Research has shown that maintenance on methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid addiction can produce the effects of hyperalgesia. This presents difficulties in the management of moderate to severe acute pain in this population. The situation is complicated by a dearth of evidence-based guidelines for pain management.

The main aims of the four studies described in this thesis were to examine whether very high intravenous morphine doses alone (55.2 mg)(targeting plasma morphine concentrations of 180 ng/ml), or in combination with ketorolac (185.4 mg)(targeting plasma ketorolac concentrations of 4000 ng/ml), tramadol (229 mg)(targeting plasma tramadol concentrations of 1000 ng/ml) or S(+)-Ketamine (S-ketamine) (14.5 mg)(targeting plasma S-ketamine concentrations of 60 ng/ml) (opioid adjuvants) produced antinociception or respiratory effects in methadone maintained subjects (methadone subjects) and buprenorphine maintained subjects (buprenorphine subjects). The antinociceptive tests of the cold pressor and electrical stimulation were utilised. The effects of different maintenance doses of methadone and buprenorphine were also examined. Methadone maintained subjects were stratified into once daily dose groups of 11-45 (n=6), 46-80 (n=6) and 81-115 (n=6) mg per day. Buprenorphine maintained subjects were stratified into once daily dose groups of 2 to 8 (n=4), 9 to 15 (n=4) and 16-22 (n=4) mg per day.

A healthy control group was administered lower doses of morphine alone (11.95 mg), and with adjuvants. The same doses of adjuvants were used in each instance.

In the first study high dose morphine failed to provide antinociception for the methadone subjects. High dose morphine significantly decreased respiration rate, but only by an average of 2 breaths per minute. Methadone subjects were hyperalgesic in the cold pressor test. There were no differences in the antinociceptive responses of the different stratified methadone groups to the high dose morphine. Methadone subjects maintained on the highest doses had the highest respiratory depression.

In the second study buprenorphine subjects performed similarly to methadone subjects in at least three respects: firstly, high dose morphine had little antinociceptive effect; secondly, this dose significantly decreased respiration rate; and thirdly, buprenorphine and methadone subjects were similarly hyperalgesic in the cold pressor test. There were also no differences in the antinociceptive responses of the different buprenorphine groups to the high dose morphine.

In the third study tramadol and ketorolac, when combined with high dose morphine, failed to provide antinociception in either the cold pressor or electrical stimulation tests to methadone subjects. The combination of S-ketamine and high dose morphine provided statistically but not clinically significant improvement in antinociception in the cold pressor test.

In the fourth study ketorolac and high dose morphine did not provide antinociception in buprenorphine maintained subjects. While the combinations of S-ketamine or tramadol and high dose morphine provided statistically significant antinociception for buprenorphine maintained subjects in the cold pressor test, it was not clear whether this change represented a clinically significant improvement.

High dose morphine alone, or combined with opioid adjuvants at these concentrations is unlikely to provide pain relief in this population. The use of higher concentrations of adjuvants in combination with high dose morphine needs to be further evaluated. Other strategies should also be explored that may provide effective pain relief in patients maintained on opioids for the treatment of opioid dependence.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Peter Athanasos, May 2013

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Publications and Presentations in Support of This Thesis

Publications

Athanasos P, Smith C, White J, Somogyi A, Bochner F and Ling W. (2006) Methadone maintenance patients are cross-tolerant to the antinociceptive effects of high morphine concentrations. *Pain*; 120: 267-275

Conference Presentations

Athanasos P, Neild R. Clinical implications of the expanding understanding of hyperalgesia in chronic opioid administration. Australian Professional Society for Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD) (2012) Melbourne

McCarthy J, Kennedy T, Semple T, Brougham L, Compton P de Crespigny C and Athanasos P. Postoperative recovery of opioid tolerant patients. Australian Professional Society for Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD) (2008) Sydney

McCarthy J, Kennedy T, Semple T, Brougham L, Compton P and Athanasos P. Postoperative opioid loading requirements following major surgery for opioid tolerant and other drug dependent patients. Australian Professional Society for Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD)/ Cutting Edge. National Alcohol, Drug and Addiction Treatment Conference (2007) Auckland, New Zealand.

Athanasos P. Pain: The new comorbidity. Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia National Conference (2007) Whyalla. (Oral Presentation)

Athanasos P and de Crespigny C. Opioid dependent patients: Specific nursing strategies for their pain management. Cutting Edge. National Alcohol, Drug and Addiction Treatment Conference (2006) Wellington, New Zealand. (Oral Presentation)

Compton P, Athanasos P and de Crespigny C. Opioid tolerance and effective management of acute pain. Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia National Conference (2006) Sydney. Pre-conference keynote workshop.

Athanasos P and de Crespigny C. Specific nursing strategies for the pain management of opioid dependent patients. Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia National Conference (2006) Sydney. (Oral Presentation).

Athanasos P, Smith C, Ling W, Bochner F, Somogyi A and White J. Morphine plus S (+) ketamine or tramadol elicit antinociception in opioid non-tolerant and buprenorphine maintained but not in methadone maintained subjects. International Association for the Study of Pain 11th World Congress (2005) Sydney, Australia.

Athanasos P, Smith C, Ling W, Bochner F, Somogyi A and White J. High dose morphine plus S (+) ketamine or tramadol elicits antinociception in buprenorphine maintained patients. 67th Annual Scientific Meeting of the College on Problems of Drug and Alcohol Dependence (2005) Orlando, Florida, USA (Oral presentation).

Athanasos P, Smith C, Hay J, White J, Somogyi A, Bochner F and Ling W. Opioid dependent patients are cross-tolerant to the antinociceptive effects of S (+) ketamine, ketorolac or tramadol and high dose morphine. 66th Annual Scientific Meeting of the College on Problems of Drug and Alcohol Dependence (2004) San Juan, Puerto Rico (Oral presentation).

Athanasos P, Smith C, White J, Somogyi A, Bochner F, Menelaou A, Edwards S and Ling W. High morphine concentrations do not provide antinociception to methadone maintenance patients. 64th Annual Meeting of the College on Problems of Drug and Alcohol Dependence (2002) Quebec City, Quebec, Canada (Oral presentation).

Athanasos P, Smith C, White J, Somogyi A, Bochner F, Menelaou A, Edwards S and Ling W. Methadone maintenance patients are cross-tolerant to the antinociceptive effects of very high morphine concentrations. Australian Professional Society for Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD) (2002) Adelaide, South Australia, Australia (Oral presentation).

Abbreviations, prefixes and symbols

(Morphine 1) (M1)

(Morphine 2) (M2)

5 hydroxytryptamine (5HT)

Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Australian Professional Society for Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD)

Buprenorphine maintained subjects (buprenorphine subjects)

Calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP)

Electrospray (ESI)

High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)

Hydrochloric acid (HCl)

Liquid chromatograph mass spectrometer (LCMS)

Methadone maintained subjects (methadone subjects)

Post methadone dose (2 hours)

Pre methadone dose (0 hours)

Quality control (QC)

Residual standard deviation of the mean (RSD)

S(+)-Ketamine (S-ketamine)

Standard error of the mean (SEM)