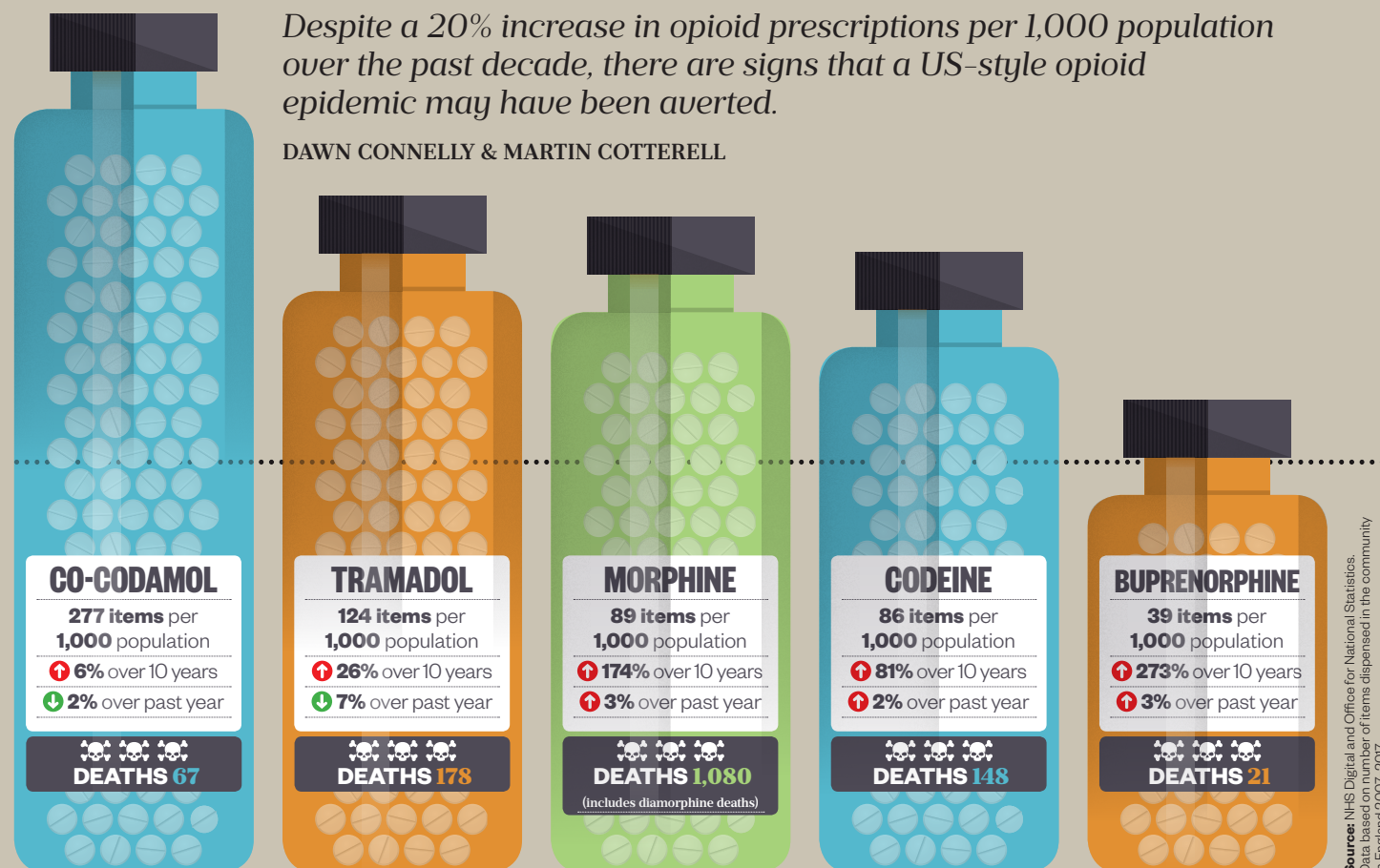


OPIOIDS IN ENGLAND: CRISIS AVERTED?

Despite a 20% increase in opioid prescriptions per 1,000 population over the past decade, there are signs that a US-style opioid epidemic may have been averted.

DAWN CONNELLY & MARTIN COTTERELL



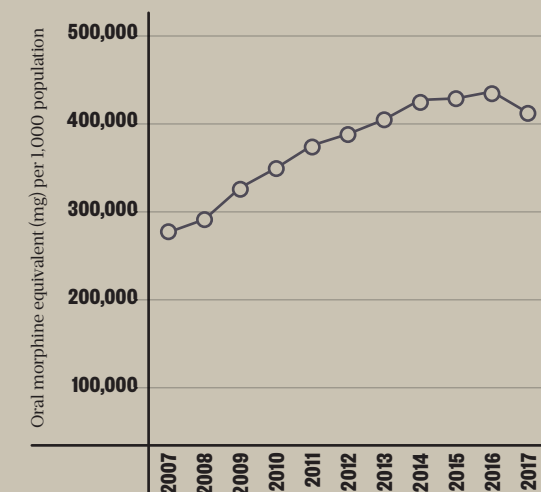
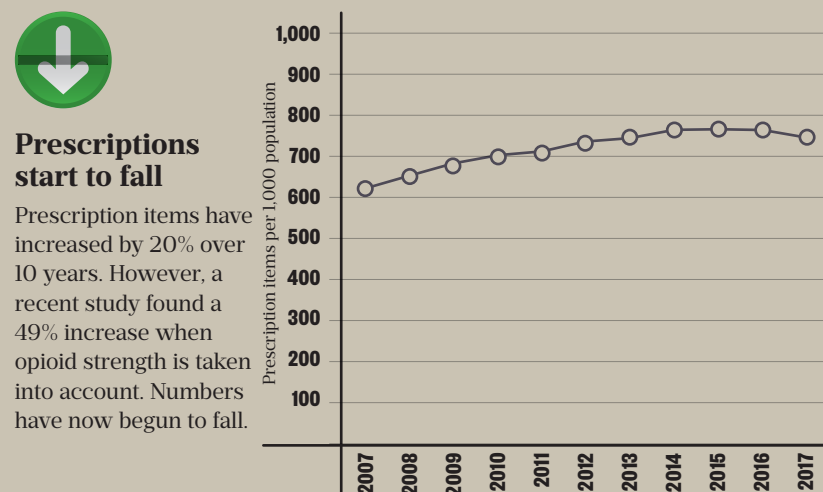
Although prescriptions have fallen recently, there is growing concern about addition to over-the-counter **co-codamol** (see page 338).

Since its reclassification as a controlled drug in 2014, **tramadol** prescriptions have decreased and annual deaths have fallen from a peak of 231.

Morphine and **diamorphine** together are responsible for the highest number of opioid-related deaths in England.

Prescriptions for **codeine** have almost doubled over the past decade, and deaths have increased by 164% over the same period.

Prescriptions for **buprenorphine** have increased dramatically since patches became available in the mid-2000s.

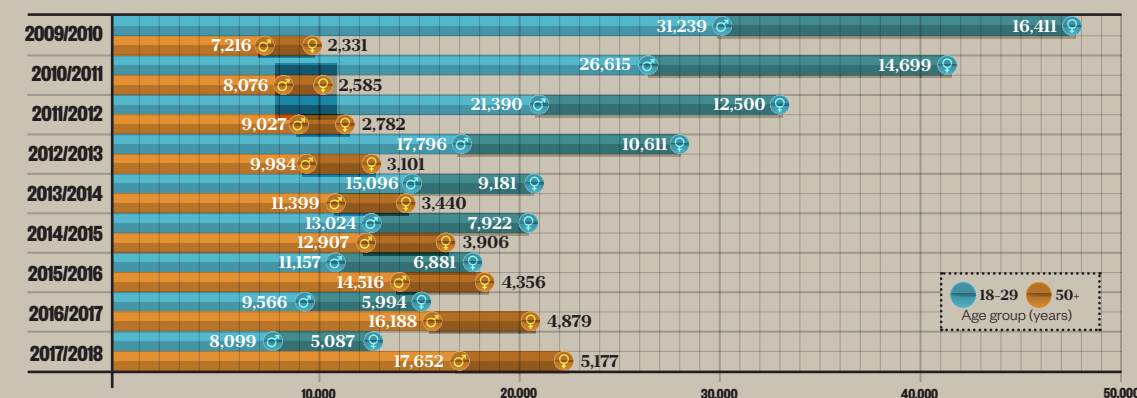


Prescriptions start to fall

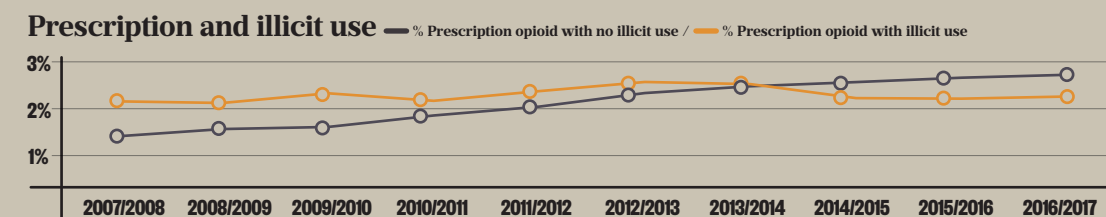
Prescription items have increased by 20% over 10 years. However, a recent study found a 49% increase when opioid strength is taken into account. Numbers have now begun to fall.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND HABITS OF OPIOID MISUSERS

While there are signs that opioid addiction is decreasing, the demographics and habits of opioid users presenting to drug treatment services are changing.

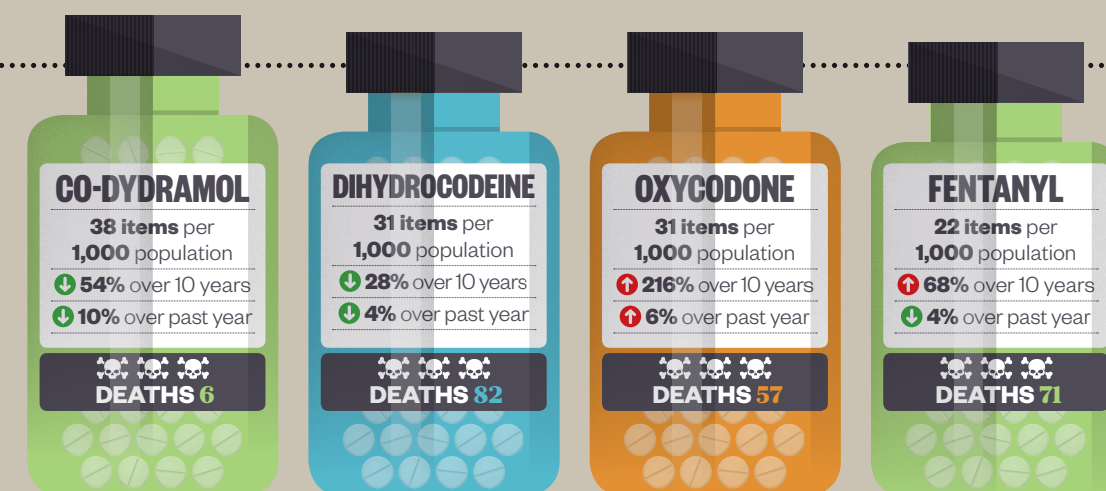


The number of people addicted to opioids aged **over 50 years** in treatment has overtaken people aged **18-29 years**



Those misusing only prescription opioids now outnumber those misusing both prescription and illicit opioids

Source: National Drug Treatment Monitoring System



Prescriptions for **co-dydramol** continue to fall, but recent approvals of higher strength products may impact this trend.

Prescriptions for **dihydrocodeine** have been steadily decreasing over the past decade.

Availability of a generic form of **Oxycontin** from 2012 may explain the rise in prescriptions for this strong analgesic.

Although **fentanyl** prescriptions have fallen, deaths have increased, reflecting its prominence as an illicit drug and its ease of overdose.

US vs. UK

Opioid consumption per capita in the United States is around three times higher than it is in the UK.



Source: International Narcotics Control Board. Data from 2016-2017



Admission and death rates slow

Opioid-related hospital admissions have fallen slightly and deaths appear to be levelling off.

*Tramadol was included in 2013, so figures after this will not be directly comparable with those before.

