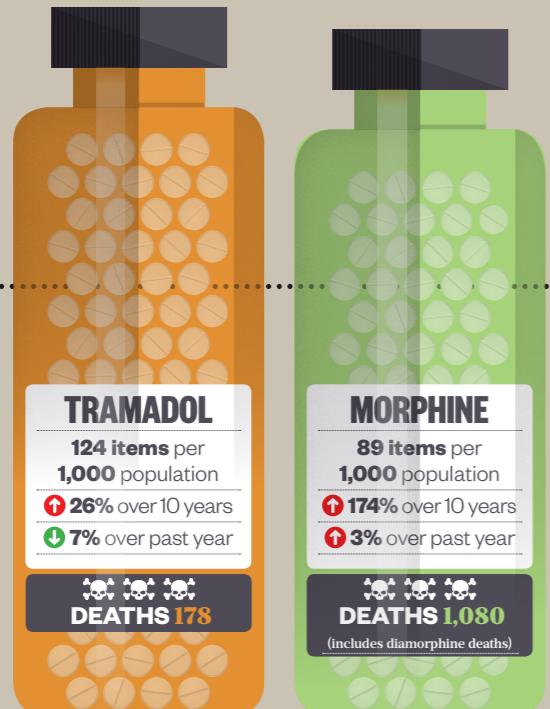
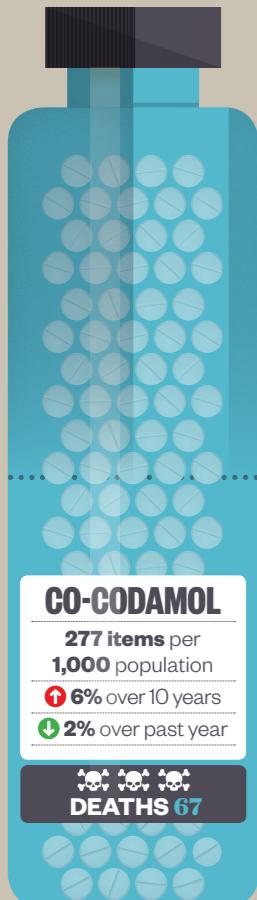


# OPIOIDS IN ENGLAND: CRISIS AVERTED?

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



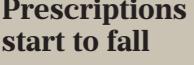
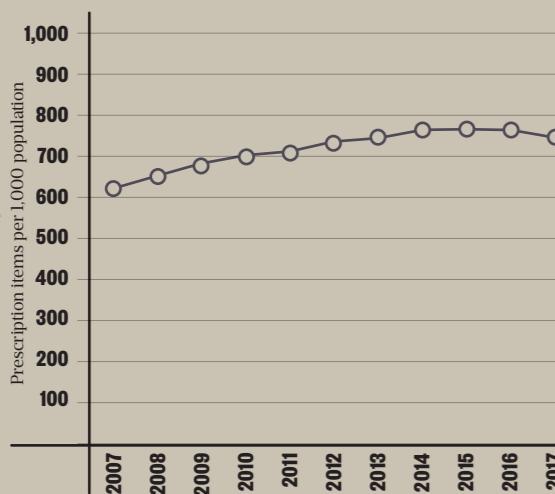
Although prescriptions have fallen recently, there is growing concern about addiction to over-the-counter co-codamol (see page 338).

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.

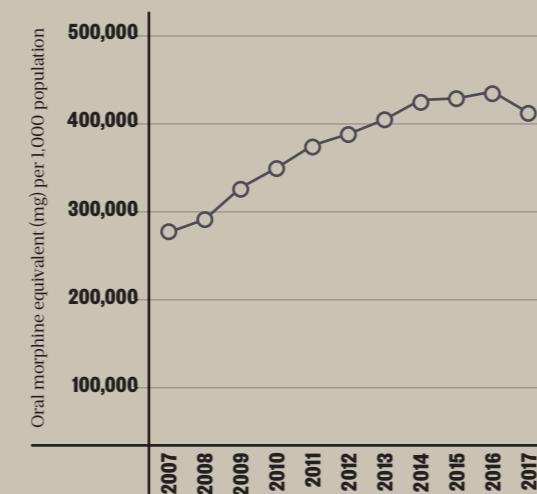
Prescriptions for codeine have almost doubled over the past decade, and deaths have increased by 164% over the same period.

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.



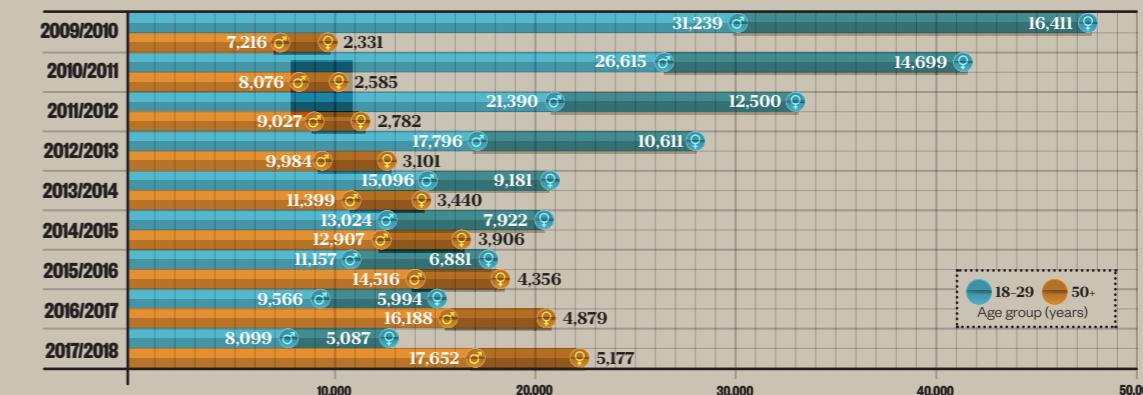
Source: DataLab and Centre for Evidence-based Medicine, Oxford University

Source: NHS Digital and Office for National Statistics. Data based on number of items dispensed in the community in England

2007-2017

## 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.



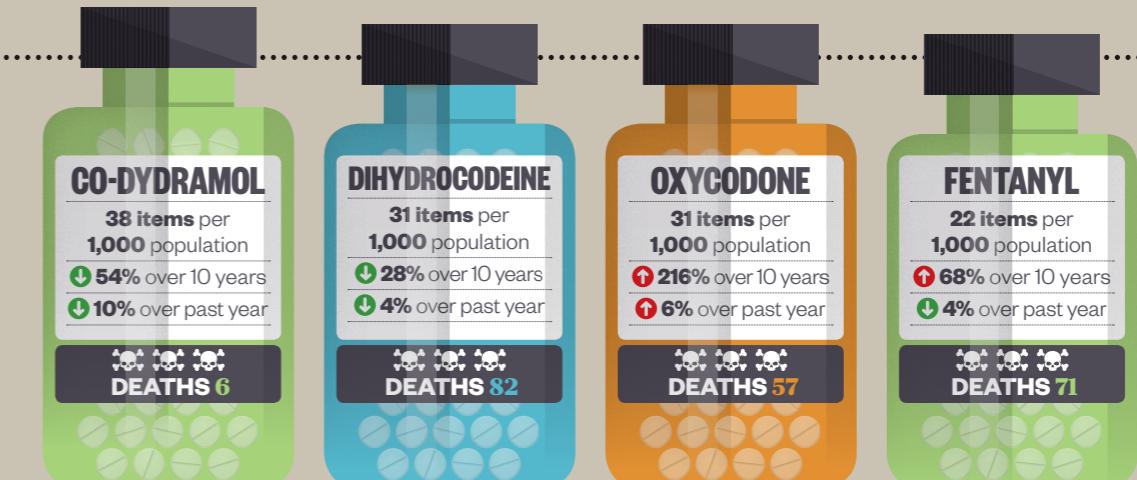
Source: Office for National Statistics. Includes prescription and illicit use

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

## Prescription and illicit use



Source: National Drug Treatment Monitoring System



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

## US VS. UK

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



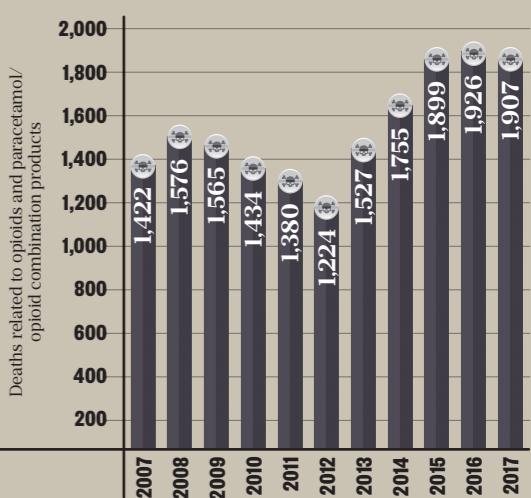
## Admission and death rates slow

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.



Source: NHS Digital. Includes admissions for poisoning, and mental and behavioural disorders, for prescription and illicit opioid use



Source: Office for National Statistics. Includes prescription and illicit use