



Isolated Pocket of Fentanyl in Scotland, 2011

SUMMARY

The powerful synthetic opioid drug fentanyl has been found in illicit white powders seized by police in a discrete district of Aberdeen, Scotland and in the post-mortem toxicology results of drug-related deaths from the same area. The first confirmed instance of it can be traced back to the death of a man on 28th February 2011, so fentanyl must have been available for an unknown time prior to this. Since then, there have been 8 police seizures and including the first case already mentioned, fentanyl has featured in the post-mortem toxicology in 3 instances. The most recent police seizure was made on 28 November 2011 and the following report describes the progress of events between these two dates.

SCOTTISH CASES

As mentioned above, fentanyl was confirmed in the post-mortem toxicology of a man who died on 28th February 2011 in Aberdeen. He had a history of drug abuse and had been using non-prescribed methadone and diazepam prior to his death and occasionally diamorphine. A cocktail of drugs were found in his system including morphine, codeine, methadone (and metabolites), diazepam, temazepam, zopiclone, cocaine (and metabolites), BZP, TFMPP, paracetamol, cannabis and fentanyl. The cause of death was officially recorded as "multiple illicit drug intoxication".

The first police seizure was made on 2 March 2011, in Aberdeen when dealer quantities of diamorphine and oxycodone (liquid and tablets) were found. Small quantities of buprenorphine tablets, diazepam tablets, Cannabis and Cannabis resin were found along with a small package which upon forensic analysis was found to contain 0.05 grams of white powder containing fentanyl. No opium alkaloids were present in the sample containing fentanyl.

The second police seizure was made on 8 March 2011 in Aberdeen, when 20 packages of white powder were recovered. Forensic analysis revealed these packages each contained approximately 0.1 grams of white powder found to contain fentanyl. Again, no opium alkaloids were detected. Additional testing subsequently showed that the powder contained less than 2% fentanyl with a large proportion of lactose.

On 21 March 2011 a 40 year old drug user died in Aberdeen. He had a history of diamorphine and diazepam abuse and had been on a substitution programme of methadone. He was a relative of a person involved in one of the police seizure cases reported above. No drugs were recovered at the scene of the death. Post mortem toxicology tests found the presence of fentanyl, diazepam (and metabolites),



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oxazepam, morphine (and codeine) and temazepam. The cause of death was certified as “fentanyl and benzodiazepine intoxication”.

On 12 April 2011, police recovered a package of white powder from a man in Aberdeen. The package was found to contain 0.1 grams of white powder which contained fentanyl. The man said he believed the substance to be ‘China white heroin’.

On 16 April 2011, two men were seen by police in Aberdeen. They discarded two packages which were each found to contain 1.74 grams of white powder containing fentanyl. Further analysis of these powders found fentanyl present at a concentration of less than 2% with a large proportion of lactose.

On 17 April 2011, an address in Aberdeen was searched by police. Two packages of powder were found which transpired to be 3.41 grams and 2.2 grams of white powder containing fentanyl.

On 15 July 2011 a 28 year old man was found dead in Aberdeen. He had been reported to be using ‘white powder like heroin called China white’ and diazepam that was prescribed to him. Fentanyl, diazepam, temazepam, oxazepam and cannabis were found in his post-mortem samples. The cause of death was certified as “fentanyl and benzodiazepine intoxication”.

On 22 July 2011, a man was found in possession of 2 small packages of powder in Aberdeen. These were found to contain 0.12 and 0.12 grams of white powder containing fentanyl.

On the same day in a related case, a house in Aberdeen was searched when 12 small packages of powder were found. These were found on examination to be 2 x 0.25 grams and 10 x 0.13 grams of white powder containing fentanyl.

The final case was from 28 November 2011 when police recovered 0.14 grams of white powder found to contain fentanyl.

All of the cases detailed above were from the same localised area of Aberdeen and there is nothing in either police intelligence or in forensic analyses to suggest that fentanyl is available elsewhere in Scotland.

REACTIONS AND SITUATION MONITORING

The emergence of fentanyl in Scotland is of serious concern and thankfully is restricted to a localized area at present, however it is recognized that the spread of fentanyl to other areas is a dire but inevitable consequence if availability continues.



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On the subject of availability, Aberdeen is an important port in the North of Scotland and many vessels from the Baltic countries arrive there on a daily basis. The fentanyl phenomenon is restricted to an area adjacent to the harbour. It is thought that the fentanyl may be coming in to Aberdeen from the Baltic states via this route and supplied to particular local dealers operating in this area as and when it comes ashore.

As a harm reduction measure, police issued a warning to drug users in the Grampian region in April 2011 and this was widely publicised on the BBC as well as local news outlets.

The UK Focal Point was alerted to the initial findings which resulted in a report to EMCDDA in June 2011.

The fentanyl issue has been discussed at many police forums and the police are actively monitoring the situation. In addition, the forensic drug laboratories and forensic toxicology laboratories in Scotland are aware of the situation and are monitoring case work on an on-going basis.

Any developments in the situation will be reported via the UK Focal Point Co-ordinator.

Submitted for your information.

Andrew Cunningham
SCDEA Forensic Science Manager
0141 302 1069