

OFFCUTS

Recently published British studies linking release from inpatient **detoxification** and **prison** to **overdose deaths** will come as no surprise to **FINDINGS** readers – these were among the risk factors highlighted in our review **► Links**. What they have in common is that abstinence and loss of tolerance occur in a protected environment which leaves the user vulnerable to overdose if they resume drug use on re-entry into their normal environment. The implication of both is that intensive follow-up care is needed in the aftermath of more or less 'enforced' tolerance reduction.

LINKS
Overdosing on opiates part I: causes, issue 4

The first study followed up 137 opiate detoxification patients released from the Bethlem's inpatient unit. All three overdose deaths in the following four months were among the 37 who had 'successfully' detoxified; none occurred among patients whose 'unsuccessful' detoxifications meant they had maintained a degree of tolerance.¹

The second study estimated that 1 in 200 young adult injectors released after at least a fortnight in Scottish prisons died from drug-related causes within the following two weeks.² The estimate derived from a study of 20,000 releases which showed that drug-related deaths were seven times more likely in the two weeks after leaving prison than at later times. The startling 1 in 200 estimate assumes that all these deaths were of injectors – perhaps a slight overestimate, but not so great as to vitiate the conclusion that leaving prison is a highly risky period for previously drug dependent inmates.

1 Strang J. *et al.* "Loss of tolerance and overdose mortality after inpatient opiate detoxification: follow up study." *British Medical Journal*: 2003, 326, p. 959–960.

2 Bird S.M. *et al.* "Male drugs-related deaths in the fortnight after release from prison: Scotland, 1996–99." *Addiction*: 2003, 98, p.185–190.