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| <b>Reference:</b>       | FOI.16018.24             |
| <b>Subject:</b>         | Potent synthetic opioids |
| <b>Date of Request:</b> | 19 November 2024         |

**Requested:**

Please provide the following data on potent synthetic opioids, in particular fentanyl and nitazene, for the period between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 to the current date, broken down by calendar year. Please send me:

1. The total number of deaths where nitazenes and fentanyl were identified or suspected from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 to the current date. Please break down the data by calendar year.
2. Any data on reported overdoses and hospitalisations where nitazenes and fentanyl were identified or suspected from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 to the current date. Please break down the data by calendar year.
3. Provide the number of cases in which nitazenes and fentanyl were recorded in toxicology reports for patients attending healthcare facilities between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 to the current date.
4. Please provide copies of any reports, surveys, or risk assessments on nitazenes conducted by or shared with your health authority during January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 to the current date.

**Response:**

1. Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB) regrets to inform you that it does not hold the information requested. The cause of death is recorded on Death Certificates issued by Registry Offices. We therefore recommend that you redirect this part of your request to the Freedom of Information Teams within each Local Authority in the UHB's footprint, who may be able to help you with your enquiry. Contact details are set out below: -

Information & Data Protection Officer, Carmarthenshire County Council, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP or by email [foia@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:foia@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)

Complaints & Freedom of Information Team, Ceredigion County Council, Canolfan Rheidol, Rhodfa Padarn, Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3UE or by email [foi@ceredigion.gov.uk](mailto:foi@ceredigion.gov.uk)

Information Governance Team, Pembrokeshire County Council, County Hall, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 1TP or by email [FOI@pembrokeshire.gov.uk](mailto:FOI@pembrokeshire.gov.uk)

2. The UHB provides, within the table below, the number of admissions relating to overdoses where fentanyl and nitazenes were identified or suspected, as recorded on the UHB's Welsh Patient Administration System (WPAS), during the 2019 to 2023 calendar years and from the period 1 January to 28 November 2024.

| Calendar year | Number |
|---------------|--------|
| 2019          | 24     |
| 2020          | 33     |
| 2021          | 21     |
| 2022          | 12     |

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| 2023                          | 12 |
| 1 January to 28 November 2024 | 7  |

3. The UHB confirms that it has no recorded cases of fentanyl and nitazenes in its toxicology reports for patients that attended a UHB facility, during the period from 1 January 2019 to 28 November 2024.
4. Substance related alerts and information, including nitazenes and fentanyl, are communicated to the UHB from Welsh Government (WG) and Public Health Wales (PHW) and are recorded on the alert log on the Welsh Emerging Drugs and Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS) website.

WEDINOS is a harm reduction project, providing an anonymous service, which includes the reflection of trends in substance use; a link to the website has been provided below:

[WEDINOS - Welsh Emerging Drugs & Identification of Novel Substances Project](#)

The WEDINOS alert log is the UHB's process for dealing with new and emerging drug threats locally and is implemented if any nitazenes were detected. This process is used to disseminate national alerts to the UHB's geography.

The UHB has identified four(4) documents relating to your request, two (2) of which are already in the public domain and are accessible by another means. Therefore, the UHB has applied a Section 21 exemption of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) as the documents are available on the PHW website within the PowerPoint presentation titled WEDINOS: Philtre April 2023 – March 2024. The two (2) documents detailed below can be accessed via the link provided below:

- i. Nitazenes within the heroin market - slide 20
- ii. Benzodiazepines and nitazines - slide 17

[PowerPoint Presentation](#)

The other two (2) documents detailed below, have been provided, at Attachments 1 and 2.

- Attachment 1 – Welsh Government (WG) Exercise Nitazene Briefing Pack
- Attachment 2 - WEDINOS N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene briefing

However, the UHB has redacted some information within Attachment 2, as it has deemed that the information requested is exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA).

Section 31(1) of the FoIA provides that information which is not exempt by virtue of Section 30 (criminal investigations and proceedings) is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime and (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. In Guidance, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has advised that Section 31, amongst other things, prevents information being disclosed that would increase the risk of the law being broken. In addition, it can be claimed by any public authority. The UHB is relying upon this exemption as it considers that releasing all of the information within Attachment 2 could impede an ongoing criminal investigation and assist in criminal activities.

Section 31(3) of the FoIA provides that the duty to confirm or deny does not arise in relation to this information. However, this exemption is subject to the public interest test.

**In favour of disclosure:** The UHB has a duty to maintain openness and transparency in all its activities, which will help to maintain public trust in the UHB. Awareness of ongoing trends in substance misuse and associated criminal activity, including the distribution of the substances, is beneficial for the public's education and the prevention of drug related incidents. Additionally, knowing how the UHB and third parties collaborate to reduce criminal activity and substance misuse will build confidence with the public, due to the social issues and concerns the subject matter raises.

**In favour of non-disclosure:** Releasing the information into the wider public domain could impede any ongoing investigations that may arise from the information notice in question. The UHB as a partner to the police, has a duty of care to its community and works proactively in the reduction and prevention of substance misuse. However, the disclosure of information at the incorrect time could provide individuals carrying out criminal activity, such as the distribution of substances, with intelligence that could impede an investigation and prevent the police from any impending action. This in turn could cause increased harm to individuals and communities.

**Decision:** The UHB has considered that releasing the information under the FoIA, to which the UHB is subject, could inhibit the UHB's ability to effectively mitigate risk of criminal activity. This will enable the UHB to maintain the provision of its services and preserve its relationships with other third-party organisations, thus protecting the wider public from criminal activities. Therefore, the UHB considers that the public interest in withholding the information is greater than the interest in disclosing.

Attachment 1 relates to a national exercise that the UHB took part in; the UHB is due to deliver a similar exercise locally during February 2025.