Prescribing of smoking cessation medication in England

Figure 1 above shows the prescribing of smoking cessation medications in England each month between June 2000 and June 2009, based on data from The Health Improvement Network, a UK primary care records database (more information below).

Recent trends

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), bupropion (Zyban) and varenicline (brand name Champix in Europe, Chantix in the USA) are pharmacological smoking cessation aids which are available on National Health Service prescription. NRT is also available over-the-counter.

For most of this period, NRT was the most commonly prescribed stop smoking medication. NRT prescribing increased until 2005, and appears to have decreased since 2007.
Bupropion prescribing has declined since reaching a peak in 2001. Bupropion was never very frequently prescribed and lagged well behind NRT for most of the period.

Varenicline became available on NHS prescription in December 2006 and rapidly became the second most commonly prescribed stop smoking drug in England after NRT.

**About the data**

THIN is a database containing the primary care records of approximately 8 million patients from 479 UK general practices, of whom 3.36 million are currently registered with a practice. Prescriptions are automatically recorded when the relevant details are entered into a computer to generate prescription forms.

From the THIN database, we extracted the total number of NRT, bupropion and varenicline prescriptions in all patients written in England each month between June 2000 and June 2009. We used the combined total as a measure for total smoking cessation medication prescriptions. The denominator for each month was the total number of live individuals contributing data to the THIN database throughout the month. We assumed that those contributing data within each month provided one person-month of follow-up, and divided the numbers of prescriptions by the total person months to derive the rate of prescribing per 100,000 of the population per month.

- The THIN data used in this study are from the THIN database from CSD Medical Research EPIC. For more information please visit: http://www.epic-uk.org/index.html