Dispensing of long-acting non-tamper-deterrent oxycodone near

the USA-Canada border

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ABSTRACT

Background

Since 2010, tamper-deterrent (TD) long-acting oxycodone has been available in both the USA and Canada, however generic non-tamper-deterrent (NTD) brands of oxycodone have only been introduced in Canada. We aimed to determine if the introduction of generic NTD oxycodone products in Canada has led to increased sales from Canadian pharmacies close to the USA border.

Methods

We conducted a retrospective analysis of long-acting oxycodone dispensing trends from Canadian community pharmacies in geographic areas contiguous with the Canada-USA border between February 1st 2012 and January 31st 2014. We reported the monthly numbers of tablets of long-acting oxycodone dispensed by province, and within each prescribing region near the US-Canada border.

Results

Over the 2-year study period, 8,662,845 long-acting oxycodone tablets were dispensed by Canadian pharmacies in geographic areas contiguous with the US border. During the study period reductions were seen in overall dispensing volumes in the border regions of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and New Brunswick. Volumes remained constant in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There was an overall increase in dispensing of LA oxycodone in Alberta, but this was due to the new TD form. Examination of the dispensing patterns in 51 border areas after marketing of NTD oxycodone brands in Canada revealed no patterns suggestive of trafficking.

Interpretation

There were no large increases in the dispensing of prescriptions for generic NTD long-acting oxycodone in Canadian pharmacies close to Canada-US border crossing such as were seen after the withdrawal of the original form of NTD OxyContin in the USA in 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Since its introduction in 1996, long-acting (LA) oxycodone has been the target of regulatory efforts to curb misuse, including changes in regulatory policy, product labeling, and product formulation.[1-7] The August 2010 introduction of a tamper-deterrent (TD) formulation of LA oxycodone in the US and the immediate removal of the original formulation (OxyContin) from the US market were seen as important steps to reduce the likelihood of misuse.[8] The original form of OxyContin remained available in Canada until late 2011 and we reported that an excess of approximately 250,000 tablets were dispensed by retail pharmacies on the Canadian side of the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel in 2010/11.[9] This was rapidly reversed after warnings were issued to prescribers and pharmacies.[5]

In August 2011 Purdue Pharma received Notice of Compliance from Health Canada to market a TD formulation of OxyContin in Canada, OxyNEO. In contrast to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA),[7] Health Canada authorized marketing of generic non-tamperdeterrent (NTD) versions of LA oxycodone in November 2012,[7] reopening the potential for the prescribing behavior observed in Canada near the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel in 2010/11.

Given their abuse potential, the differential availability of generic NTD formulations of LA oxycodone between the US and Canada has raised concerns of large-scale, organized drug-seeking behavior across the international border. We analyzed dispensing data from Canadian pharmacies close to the US-Canada border to look for evidence of trafficking of these products.

METHODS

We conducted a population-based serial, cross-sectional study of all LA oxycodone dispensed by Canadian pharmacies located in areas adjacent to US-Canada border crossings (by land, bridge or ferry) between February 1, 2012 and January 31, 2014. This period includes the date of introduction of generic LA oxycodone to the market (November 26, 2012). We

studied dispensing close to 113 border crossings, excluding the 3 crossings between Yukon and Alaska because of incomplete dispensing records. Dispensing regions close to border crossings were delineated by forward sortation areas (FSAs), a well-established unit of aggregation for Canadian postal codes.[10] In some cases, several border crossings lay within one dispensing region. In total, the 113 border crossings included in our analyses were mapped to 51 dispensing regions (Supplementary Appendix eTable 1). All prescriptions for LA oxycodone dispensed by retail pharmacies within each FSA were included in the study.

We used the IMS Brogan Geographic Prescription Monitor database to quantify retail prescription volumes for all LA oxycodone products over our study period. This includes both privately and publicly funded prescriptions. This database captures data from a representative sample of 5700 retail pharmacies across Canada, which provides monthly estimates by geographic area at the product form and strength level. These projections used methods that incorporate factors including the number of pharmacies in a given region, the distance between IMS-captured and un-captured pharmacies, and the size of the pharmacies.[11] The resulting product-level projected volumes are representative of all pharmacies in Canada, and are used regularly for research purposes.[9;12] Over the 2-year study period, monthly prescription volumes (numbers of tablets dispensed) for all LA oxycodone products were obtained for each of the 51 dispensing regions, stratified by formulation type (brand vs. generic). Tablet numbers are presented at the level of province and dispensing region.

Because several FSAs are rural, sparsely populated and less likely to be sources of trafficked drugs, we conducted additional analyses of LA oxycodone prescription volumes in more populated areas close to (but not contiguous with) the US-Canada border. In each province, we identified 2 cities with populations greater than 10,000 that were within 150 kilometers (93 miles) of a border crossing (Supplementary Appendix eTable 2). We excluded Ontario, the most populous province, from this exercise as highly populated Ontario centres in

close proximity to the US-Canada border were included in the primary analysis. Dispensing regions were defined in these cities using FSAs, and LA oxycodone volumes were evaluated in the same way as in the primary analysis. The graphs displaying prescribing rates over time were inspected visually as we were unable to obtain sufficient historical data to enable formal time series analyses.

RESULTS

We identified 1 to 8 border crossings within each of the 51 dispensing regions. The population density varied substantially, from 0.14 residents per km² (near the Rainy River International Bridge between Ontario and Minnesota) to 4,796 residents per km² (near the Victoria-Port Angeles ferry crossing between British Columbia and Washington). Over the study period, 8,662,845 LA oxycodone tablets were dispensed by pharmacies in these dispensing regions. Between the first full month of generic LA oxycodone availability (December 2012) and the end of the study period, generic formulations comprised 11.9% (536,926 of 4,527,083) of the total number of dispensed tablets, although this varied considerably by province, from 0.1% in Saskatchewan to 29.3% in Quebec (Supplemental Appendix eTable 3).

Over the entire 2-year study period dispensing volumes did not change dramatically at the provincial level (Figure 1). Reductions were seen in overall dispensing of LA oxycodone in the border regions of Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and New Brunswick. Volumes remained constant in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There was an overall increase in dispensing of LA oxycodone in Alberta, but this was driven by the new TD form.

Between the introduction of the generic formulations in December 2012 and the end of the study period (January 2014) the number of tablets dispensed near the US-Canada border in each province decreased in British Columbia (20.1% decrease from 66,195 to 52,868 tablets), Ontario (16.6% decrease from 179,667 tablets to 149,861 tablets monthly) and Quebec (1.3%

decrease from 48,541 to 47,925 tablets monthly) (Figure 1). In Manitoba and New Brunswick, there were slight increases in the amount of LA oxycodone dispensed near the border over this time (7.8% increase from 12,028 to 12,969 tablets monthly in Manitoba and 3.5% increase from 29,391 to 30,425 tablets monthly in New Brunswick). Both Alberta and Saskatchewan demonstrated substantial relative increases in the volume of LA oxycodone dispensed near the border between December 2012 and January 2014 (48.8% increase from 13,933 to 20,736 tablets monthly in Alberta and 94.4% increase from 5,053 to 9,823 tablets monthly in Saskatchewan). However, only 3,216 tablets and 125 tablets of NTD oxycodone were dispensed in the border prescribing regions in Alberta and Saskatchewan respectively over this time.

We inspected prescribing patterns for the 51 individual dispensing regions adjacent to the Canada-US border, seeking the type of signal previously observed at pharmacies adjacent to the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel.[9] No substantial fluctuations in volume of LA oxycodone dispensing were observed (Supplementary Appendix eFigures 1-6). The data for the 14 border crossing regions in Ontario are given in Figure 2. Similarly, no substantial fluctuations in monthly prescribing volumes were detected by the analysis of dispensing volumes in larger cities near the US-Canada border (Figure 3).

INTERPRETATION

In this population-based study of Canadian retail pharmacies located near the US-Canada border, we found no indication of increased volumes of LA oxycodone dispensing following the introduction of generic non tamper deterrent formulations in Canada. This suggests that, despite the differential availability of these formulations, there has not been highvolume diversion of these drugs from Canadian retail pharmacies into the US, such as we observed at the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel in 2010 and 2011.[9] Our findings may be influenced by the slow adoption of generic formulations of LA oxycodone in most regions of Canada. Indeed, Quebec is the only province that borders the US in which generic formulations represented a significant proportion of the LA oxycodone market (29%). This high rate of uptake is driven by a public drug plan policy in Quebec that only reimburses patients for the lowest cost generic equivalent of brand name agents, when generics are available.[13] This likely incentivizes patients in Quebec to receive generic LA oxycodone due to the large cost differential between generic and brand name formulations of this drug. Despite this high rate of dispensing in Quebec, the volume of LA oxycodone dispensed close to the Quebec/USA border crossings did not increase after the introduction of the generic NTD formulations.

This study has several limitations. The methods we employed are likely to detect only geographically concentrated, high-volume diversion of drugs dispensed from Canadian retail pharmacies close to US-Canada border crossings. Although this method previously detected such patterns,[9] diversion of small volumes would not be captured. Although the consistency of the findings reinforce the suggestion that there is no large-scale diversion occurring from Canada into the US, it does not preclude the possibility of increased LA oxycodone dispensing in localized regions that were not included in this analysis. Second, interventional time series analysis could not be performed due to limitations of data availability prior to the interventions of interest. Finally, we are unable to obtain data on stolen oxycodone tablets, and therefore this analysis is restricted to describing volumes of LA oxycodone legally obtained from Canadian retail pharmacies.

Despite these findings, Canadian clinicians and pharmacists should remain cautious in their prescribing and dispensing of non-tamper-deterrent formulations of oxycodone because of their high potential for misuse and abuse.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The statements, findings, conclusions, views, and opinions contained and expressed in this publication are based in part on data obtained under license from IMS Health Canada Inc. concerning the following information service(s): IMS Brogan Geographic Prescription Monitor database, data period February 2012 to January 2014. All Rights Reserved. The statements, findings, conclusions, views, and opinions contained and expressed herein are not necessarily those of IMS Health Canada Inc. or any of its affiliated or subsidiary entities

GUARANTOR

Tara Gomes had full access to all of the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors report having no competing interests.

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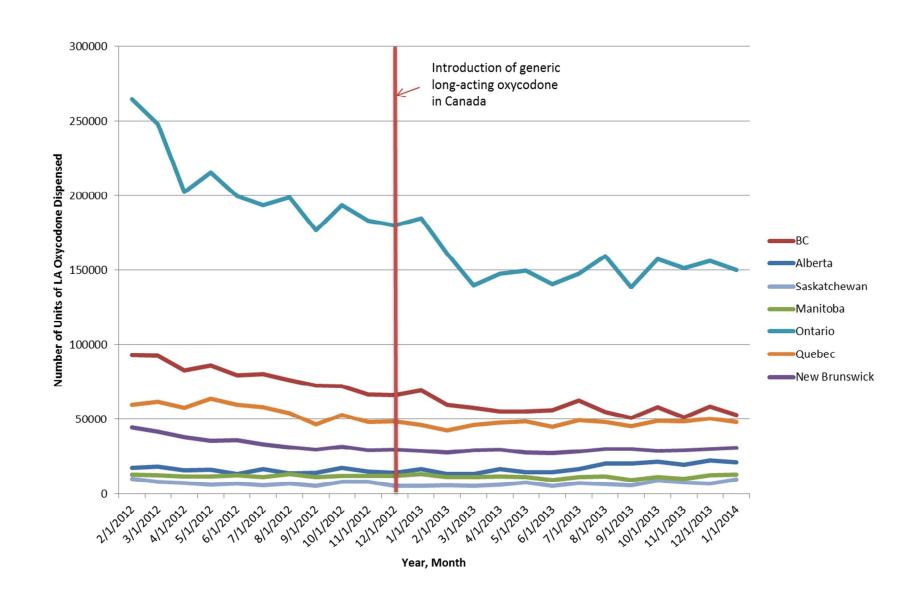


Figure 1 Volumes of long-acting oxycodone tablet dispensing in regions near USA-Canada border crossings by province. February 2012 – January 2014

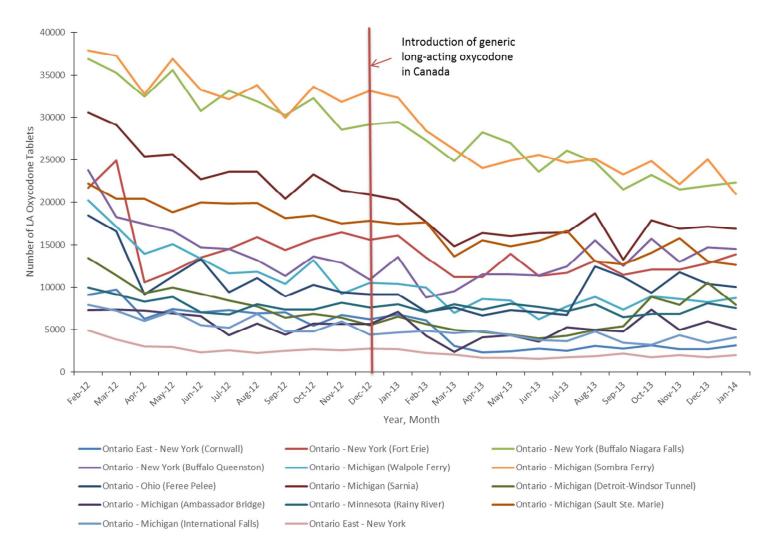


Figure 2. Volumes of long-acting oxycodone tablet dispensing in regions near US-Canada border crossings in Ontario. February 2012 – January 2014

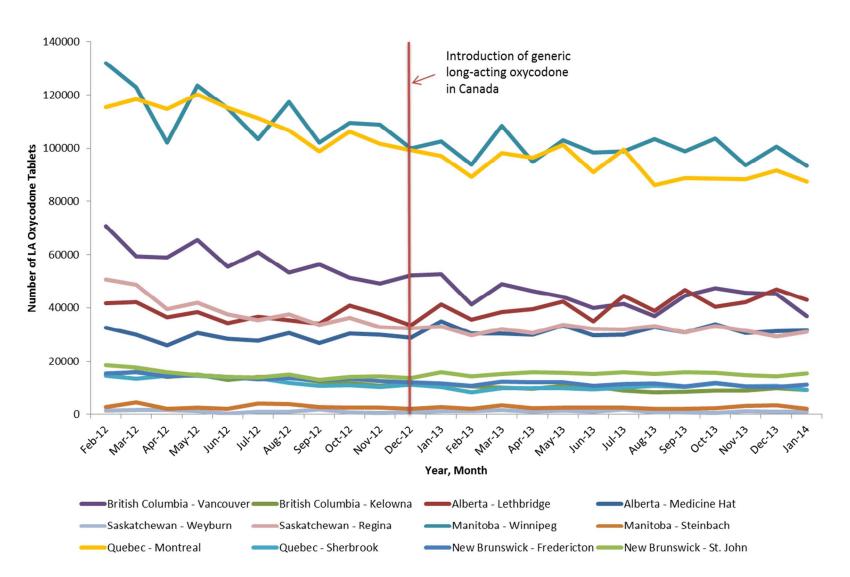


Figure 3: Volumes of long-acting oxycodone tablet dispensing in cities within 150km of USA-Canada border crossings. February 2012 – January 2014.

Supplementary Appendix

eTable 1: List of all Prescribing Regions and Border Crossings (US-Canada	a) contained
within each Region	

Prescribing Region	# Crossings	Canadian Province	US State
Border Crossings	7	Alberta	Montono
ALBERTA-MONTANA Whitlash-Aden	1	Alberta	Montana
Piegan-Carway			
Sweetgrass-Coutts			
Del Bonita-Del Bonita			
Wildhorse-Wildhorse			
Chief Mountain			
Willow Creek	2	Duitich Columbia	
BC-IDAHO-MONTANA	3	British Columbia	Idaho and Montana
Porthill-Rykerts			
Roosville-Roosville			
Eastport-Kingsgate			
BC-WASHINGTON EAST	3	British Columbia	Washingtor
Frontier-Paterson			
Metaline Falls-Nelway			
Boundary-Waneta			
BC-WASHINGTON CENTRAL	4	British Columbia	Washingtor
Laurier-Cascade			
Danville-Carson			
Ferry-Midway			
Oroville-Osoyoos			
BC-WASHINGTON NIGHTHAWK	1	British Columbia	Washington
Nighthawk-Chopaka			
BC-WASHINGTON SUMAS	1	British Columbia	Washingtor
Sumas-Abbotsford Huntington			
BC-WASHINGTON WEST	2	British Columbia	Washingtor
Blaine-Pacific Highway			
Blaine-Douglas			
BC-WASHINGTON PT ROBERTS	1	British Columbia	Washingtor
Point Roberts-Boundary Bay			
BC-WASHINGTON LYNDEN	1	British Columbia	Washingtor
Lynden-Aldergrove			
BC-ALASKA	2	British Columbia	Alaska
Ketchikan			
Dalton Cache-Prince Rupert			
BC ISLAND-WASHINGTON	2	British Columbia	Washingtor
Anacortes			
Friday Harbor-Washington State Ferry Te	rminal		

BC ISLAND-WASHINGTON BELLEVILLE	1	British Columbia	Washingtor
Port Angeles-Belleville Terminal MANITOBA-MINNESOTA	5	Manitoba	Minnesota
Lancaster-Tolstoi	5	Walltoba	wiintesota
Pembina-Emerson			
Pinecreek-Piney			
Roseau-South Junction			
Warroad-Sprague			
MANITOBA CENTRAL-N DAKOTA	3	Manitoba	North Dako
Maida-Windygate	•		
Neche-Gretna			
Hannah-Snowflake			
MANITOBA WCENTRAL-N DAKOTA	4	Manitoba	North Dako
Sarles-Crystal City			
St. John-Lena			
Dunseith-Boissevain			
Hansboro-Cartwright			
WEST MANITOBA-N DAKOTA	3	Manitoba	North Dako
Westhope-Coulter			
Carbury-Goodlands			
Antler-Lyleton			
MANITOBA-N DAKOTA WALHALLA	1	Manitoba	North Dako
Walhalla-Winkler			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE MILLTOWN	1	New Brunswick	Maine
Milltown-Milltown			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE NE	3	New Brunswick	Maine
Madawaska-Edmundston			
Limestone-Gillespie			
Hamlin-Grand Falls			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE CAMPOBELLO	1	New Brunswick	Maine
Lubec-Campobello			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE VANCEBORO	1	New Brunswick	Maine
Vanceboro-St. Croix			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE NORTH	3	New Brunswick	Maine
Fort Kent-Clair			
Van Buren-St. Leonard			
Fort Fairfield-Andover			
Easton-River de Chute			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE HOULTON	1	New Brunswick	Maine
Houlton-Woodstock Road			
NEW BRUNSWICK-MAINE CALAIS	1	New Brunswick	Maine
Calais-St. Stephen			

ONTARIO EAST-NEW YORK	3	Ontario	New York
Cape Vincent-Point Alexandria			
Alexandria Bay-Lansdowne			
Ogdensburg-Prescott			
	1	Ontario	New York
Massena-Cornwall	-		
ONTARIO-NEW YORK FORT ERIE	1	Ontario	New York
Buffalo-Fort Erie			
ONTARIO-NEW YORK BUFFALO NF	2	Ontario	New York
Niagara Falls-Niagara Falls			
Buffalo-Niagara Falls-Fort Erie and Niagara Falls			
ONTARIO-NEW YORK BUFFALO QUEENSTON	1	Ontario	New York
Lewiston-Niagara Falls			
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN WALPOLE FERRY	1	Ontario	Michigan
Algonac-Walpole Island Ferry			-
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN SOMBRA FERRY	1	Ontario	Michigan
Marine City-Sombra Ferry			
ONTARIO-OHIO FEREE PELEE	1	Ontario	Ohio
Sandusky-Pelee Island			
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN SARNIA	1	Ontario	Michigan
Port Huron-Sarnia			
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN DW TUNNEL	1	Ontario	Michigan
Detroit-Windsor			
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN AMBASSADOR	1	Ontario	Michigan
Detroit-Windsor			
ONTARIO-MINNESOTA RAINY RIVER	1	Ontario	Minnesota
Baudette-Rainy River	9		
ONTARIO-MICHIGAN SAULT STE MARIE	1	Ontario	Michigan
Sault Ste. Marie-Sault Ste. Marie			
ONTARIO-MINNESOTA INT FALLS	1	Ontario	Minnesota
International Falls-Ranier			
QUEBEC-MAINE ESTCOURT	1	Quebec	Maine
Estcourt Station-Pohenegamook			
QUEBEC EAST-MAINE	2	Quebec	Maine
St Aurelie-St Aurelie			
Jackman-Armstrong			
QUEBEC EAST-MAINE PAMPHILE	2	Quebec	Maine
St. Pamphile-St. Pamphile			
St-Just-de-Bretenieres-St-Just-de-Bretenieres			
QUEBEC-MAINE WOBURN	1	Quebec	Maine
Coburn Gore-Woburn			

QUEBEC-VERMONT EAST	6	Quebec	Vermont
Beebe Plain-Stanstead			
Pittsburg-Chartierville			
Beecher Falls-East Hereford			
Canaan-Hereford Road			
Derby Line-Stanstead (55)			
Derby Line-Stanstead (Rte 143)			
QUEBEC-VERMONT CENTRAL	3	Quebec	Vermont
East Richford-Glen Sutton			
Richford-Abercorn			
North Troy-Highwater			
QUEBEC-VERMONT WEST	8	Quebec	Vermont
Morses Line-Morses Line			
West Berkshire-Frelighsburg			
Pinnacle - East Pinnacle			
Alburg Springs-Clarenceville			
Champlain-Rouses Point-Lacolle			
Champlain- St. Bernard De Lacolle			
Overton Corners-Localle: Route 221			
Highgate Springs-Alburg-Phillipsburg-Noyan			
QUEBEC-NEW YORK MOOERS	1	Quebec	New York
Mooers-Hemmingford			
QUEBEC-NEW YORK WEST	4	Quebec	New York
Trout River-Trout River and Jamieson			
Malone-Trout River			
Massena-Dundee			
Cannon's Corner - Covey Hill			
QUEBEC-VERMONT NORTON	1	Quebec	Vermonth
Norton-Stanhope			
SASKATCHEWAN EAST-N DAKOTA	6	Saskatchewan	North Dakot
Sherwood-Carievale			
Raymond-Regway			
Northgate-Northgate			
Portal-North Portal			
Fortuna-Oungre			
Ambrose-Torquay			
SASKATCHEWAN-MONTANA	2	Saskatchewan	Montana
Scobey-Coronach			
Opheim-West Poplar			
SASKATCHEWAN WEST-MONTANA	2	Saskatchewan	Montana
Morgan-Monchy			

SASKATCHEWAN-N DAKOTA NOONAN	1	Saskatchewan	North Dakota
Noonan-Estevan			

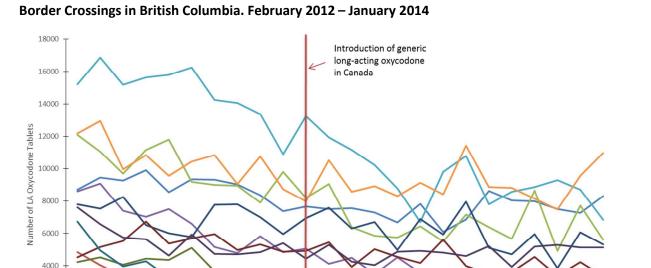
eTable 2: Details of Cities included in Sensitivity Analysis

		Approximate Distance to	Approximate Population
Province	City Name	Border	Size
Alberta	Lethbridge	104km	89,074
Alberta	Medicine Hat	140km	60,005
British Columbia	Kelowna	115km	117,312
British Columbia	Vancouver	50km	603,502
Manitoba	Winnipeg	106km	663,617
Manitoba	Steinbach	72km	13,524
New Brunswick	Fredericton	93km	56,224
New Brunswick	Saint John	113km	70,063
Quebec	Montreal	66km	1,649,519
Quebec	Sherkbrooke	68km	154,601
Saskatchewan	Weyburn	76km	10,484
Saskatchewan	Regina	162km	193,100

eTable 3: Canadian market share of generic long-acting oxycodone tablets near the US-Canada border following their introduction in Canada. December 2012 – January 2014.

Province	Number of long- acting oxycodone tablets dispensed	Number of generic long-acting oxycodone tablets dispensed	% generic long-acting oxycodone tablets
Alberta	242,068	3,216	1.3
British Columbia	807,713	143,942	17.8
Manitoba	158,901	4,665	2.9
Ontario	2,162,448	143,549	6.6
Quebec	660,715	193,317	29.3
New Brunswick	402,872	48,112	11.9
Saskatchewan	92,366	125	0.1
Total	4,527,083	536,926	11.9

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Year, Month

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British Columbia - Washington East

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British Columbia - Washington Lynden

British Columbia Island - Washington (Belleville)

APT-13 Mayili

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British Columbia - Washington Central

British Columbia - Washington West

British Columbia - Alaska

eFigure 1: Volume of Long-Acting Oxycodone Tablet Dispensing in Dispensing Regions Near US-Canada

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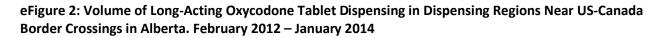
British Columbia-Idaho-Montana

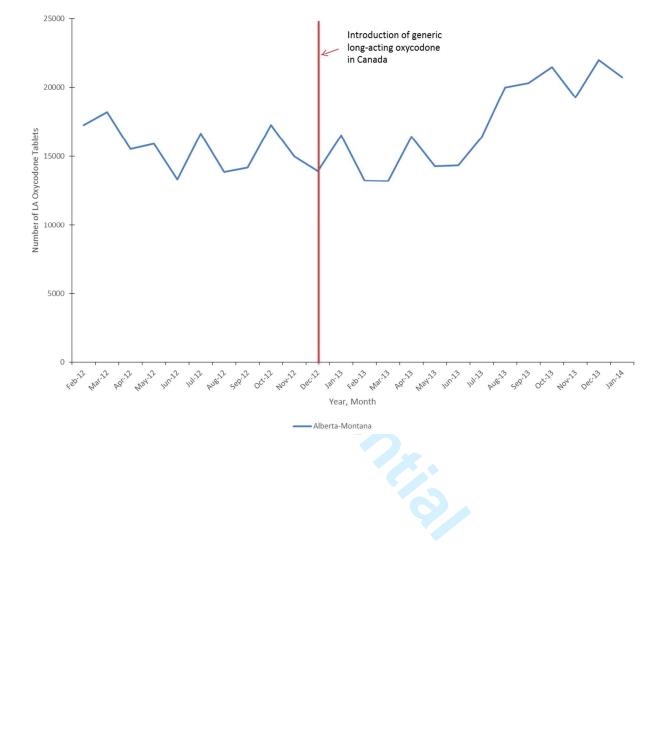
British Columbia - Washington (Nighthawk)

British Columbia - Washington Pt. Roberts

British Columbia Island - Washington

Sepi2 OCtil



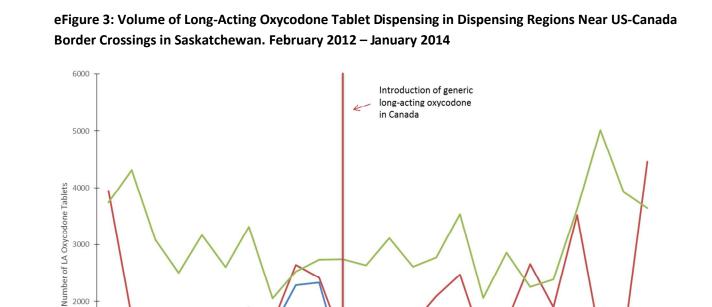


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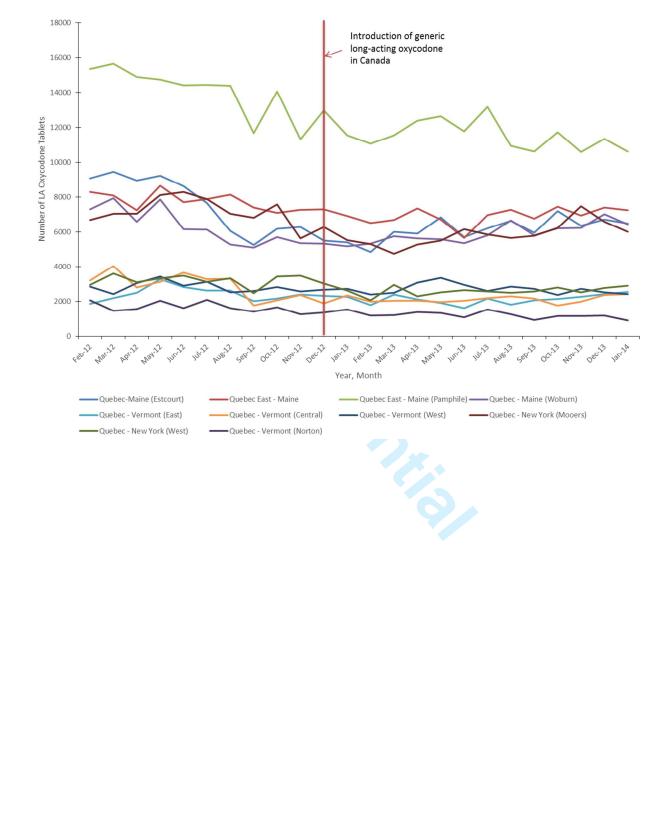
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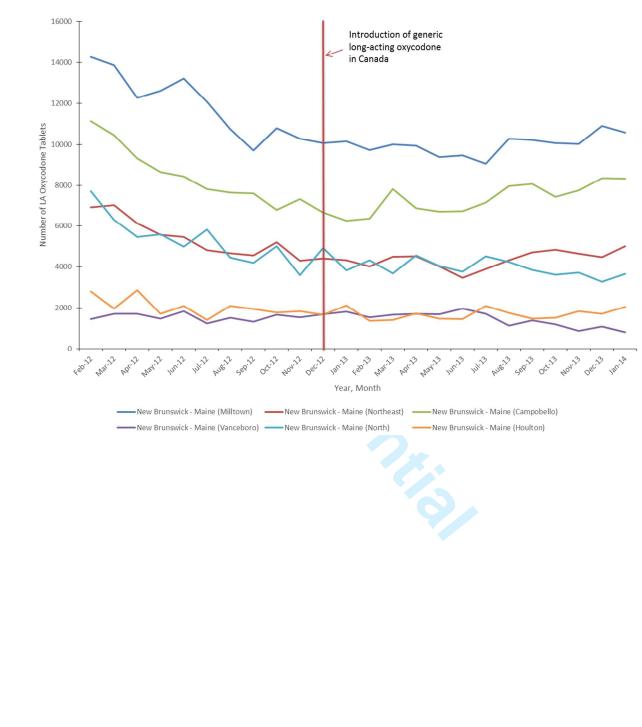
-Saskatchewan - North Dakota (Noonan)





eFigure 5: Volume of Long-Acting Oxycodone Tablet Dispensing in Dispensing Regions Near US-Canada Border Crossings in Quebec. February 2012 – January 2014





eFigure 6: Volume of Long-Acting Oxycodone Tablet Dispensing in Dispensing Regions Near US-Canada Border Crossings in New Brunswick. February 2012 – January 2014