Opiate Addiction: Evidence-Based Treatment

Rick Christensen, PA, CAS

War is being waged on our patients every day due to a gross misunderstanding of an incredibly effective medication called methadone.

Who Discriminates?

*Doctors  *Psychiatrists
*Social Workers  *Probation Officers
*Communities  *Employers
*Judges  *Family members

The last bastion of discrimination that seems to be OK (ADA)
Societal Consequences of Opiate Addiction

- Untreated opiate addiction costs $20 billion per year (National Institute of Health, 1997)
- Increased criminal activity
- Increased health problems-HIV/Hep. C
- Disrupted personal and family relationships
- Deteriorating or loss of employment
- Destructive to communities

Death Rates in Treated and Untreated Heroin Addicts

Impact of MMT on IV Drug Use for 388 Male MMT Patients in 6 Programs


Adapted from Ball & Ross - The Effectiveness of Methadone Maintenance Treatment, 1991
Crime among 491 patients before and during MMT at 6 programs

According to the North Dakota Board of Pharmacy (2011)

29 million narcotic analgesics are dispensed in ND every year

43 pills for every man, woman and child in the state

This is a brain disease not a disease of weakness or will

- Inappropriate neurochemical imbalance caused by heroin that results in fundamental brain changes that do not just return to normal
- Based on brain scans
- Fundamental changes do not return to normal with abstinence
- Primarily normalized with medication
- Medical condition with strong behavioral components
Types of Pharmacotherapy for Opioid Addiction

- Methadone - Agonist
  - used for past 30 yrs, volumes of research showing efficacy, efficiency, and safety
- Naltrexone - Antagonist
  - Used since 1984
- Buprenorphine - Partial Agonist
  - Subutex
  - Suboxone

There is no longer any doubt that methadone is effective for opiate addicted subjects treated with adequate doses along with psychosocial supports. From a body of research, including numerous clinical trials, we know that, when compared to buprenorphine, methadone:

New England Journal of Medicine April 2014 - describes a number of misperceptions that have limited access to life-saving medications such as methadone and calls upon health care providers to **expand** their use of medications to treat opioid addiction.

Medications such as methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone are **safe and cost-effective components of opioid addiction treatment** - NIDA director Nora D. Volkow, M.D.

Prescription drug overdoses in the United States are skyrocketing. The good news is we can prevent this problem by stopping the source and treating the troubled,” CDC director Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.

Appropriate access to medication-assisted therapies under Medicaid is a **key piece of the strategy** to address the rising rate of death from overdoses of prescription opioids - Stephen Do, M.D., M.H.S., Chief medical officer for the Center for Medicaid

---

**Impact of Methadone Treatment**

- Reduction death rates (Grondlah, '90)
- Reduction crime days (Ball & Ross)
- Reduction rate of HIV seroconversion (Bourne, '88; Novick '90; Metzger '93)
- Reduction in IV drug use relapse (Ball & Ross)
- Improved employment, health, and social function
Goals of Pharmacotherapy
- Prevention or reduction of withdrawal symptoms
- Prevention or reduction in drug craving
- Prevention of relapse to use of addictive drug
- Restoration toward normalcy of any physiological function disrupted by drug abuse

Issues in Maintenance
How Much and How Long?

Adequacy of Dose is Based on Two Factors
- The Amount of Medication
- Frequency of Dosing; the inter-dose interval (24, 12, 8, hours, etc.)

*Individualize Dose based on Clinical Response*
How Long Does Opioid Agonist Treatment Last?

Long Enough
...As long as the client desires and benefits from treatment

Comprehensive Treatment

- Treat dual diagnosis and other substance use
- Referral for treatment for other chronic illnesses
- Case management
- Peer support

Summary

- Opioid dependence is a chronic, progressive, often fatal illness most people do not get.
- The number of people in the US using opioids is increasing
- More people are abusing and becoming addicted to diverted prescription opioids than at any time
- Pharmacologic treatments are effective in decreasing illicit opioid use, medical and social complications