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Suboxone Starter Guide: Essentials for Healthcare Providers

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Suboxone Starter Guide: Essentials for Healthcare Providers

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Problem Identification

Initiating suboxone is a frequent chief concern in the primary care setting

Suboxone is often an accessible, affordable, and very effective medication for the management of opioid use disorder

Beginning suboxone requires nuanced decision-making and detailed understanding of anticipated concerns to best support patients' course of treatment

AHEC Core Areas supported by this project: Interprofessional education, medical practice transformation, current and emerging health issues, behavioural health integration

Public Health Cost

“Caledonia County is faring about the same as the average county in Vermont for Health Factors, and better than the average county in the nation.”



In Caledonia County, Vermont, there were 41 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people.

Compare to 30 per 100,000 in VT, or 27 per 100,000 in the US.



Effective implementation of suboxone and other MAT have the potential to...

Decrease overdose deaths and costs to hospitals and emergency rooms for management of overdoses

Reduce IVDU-associated disease burden

Support rehabilitation and maintenance of a productive societal workforce and community and alleviate strain on emergency personnel

Community Perspectives

There are challenges with the disorder itself being treated as well as side effects of suboxone which must be anticipated to help guide patients.



Maintenance of suboxone is often a straightforward process, when a patient is handed off from another MAT site. However, the initiation of suboxone is “nuanced and not a topic that a flowchart would necessarily work for.” – **Regional MAT Nurse**



Having a robust team of MAT providers is effective but additional resources could help “even out the confidence levels” of all providers in independently starting suboxone. – **Family Medicine Physician**

Intervention and Methodology



Knowledge gaps in suboxone initiation were identified by MAT team and providers

Collection of common challenges was already under way internally as part of a larger effort to improve experiences with providing and receiving RAM



Existing suboxone induction anticipatory guidance was synthesized into succinct, patient friendly language as a handout with content directly informed by FAQ to MAT team by both patients and providers

Results and Response



The creation of the handout!

The rough draft was presented during a working meeting with the MAT team which led to the creation of a provider facing handout (shown here) as well as an adapted version which is patient facing.



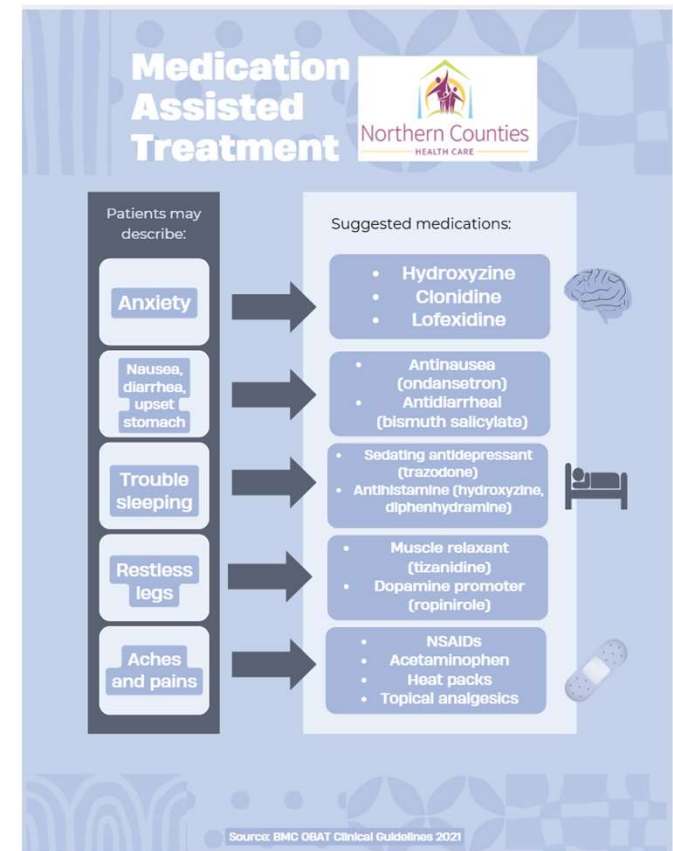
Implementation of the handout is ongoing, but initial responses include...

Providers offering feedback on how they will be able to implement this handout for their patients

MAT team supported by having their usual guidance all in one place

As MAT teams roll out in other locations, this handout will likely be passed along to support even more providers and their patients

A live version of the document will exist internally so it can be updated as needed



Evaluation of Effectiveness

Further review of handouts with providers to determine appropriateness of included content on handout

Tracking utilization of handouts by providers

Monitoring success of handout by measure of continuation of treatment

Limitations:

- Requires patient to have literacy to engage
- Printed materials can be challenging to keep evergreen, in stock, and in an easily accessible spot for dissemination and reference

Citations

- Existing internal patient education forms at HAHC for assistance with alcohol withdrawal
- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. Vermont, Caledonia County Health Data. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. Published 2024. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/vermont/caledonia?year=2024>
- Provider Clinical Support System (PCSS). BMC Suboxone Initiation Guide. Published June 2021. Accessed March 7, 2025. https://pcssnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/22_2021_Clinical_Guidelines_06.22.21.FINAL_.pdf
- UpToDate. Opioid Withdrawal: Medically Supervised Withdrawal During Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (COWS Scale). Accessed March 7, 2025. [https://www-uptodate-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/contents/opioid-withdrawal-medically-supervised-withdrawal-during-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder](https://www.uptodate-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/contents/opioid-withdrawal-medically-supervised-withdrawal-during-treatment-for-opioid-use-disorder)