**Medication for Opioid Use Disorder FAQ FOR FAMILIES**

1. What is an opioid?

Opioids are drugs related to opium. These are commonly used to treat pain and prescribed as Oxycodone, Vicodin, Percocet, etc. medications can be extremely habit forming leading some people to become dependent or to develop an addiction or an opioid use disorder. Methadone and buprenorphine are also opioids, but are used to treat opioid use disorder because they help improve or completely discontinue behaviors associated with addiction.

2. Why are opioids used to treat opioid dependence or addiction?

Many wonder why we use opioids to treat opioid dependence. Buprenorphine (the active ingredient in Subutex, Suboxone, Zubsolv, Sublocade, etc.) and methadone are not just a substitution. Buprenorphine and methadone help stabilize the brain of someone with an opioid use disorder or addiction, which prevents behaviors associated with the brain disease of addiction. This includes preventing overdose death, preventing patients from getting into legal troubles, reducing the risk of getting diseases and infections, and helping to stabilize their social settings. In short, these very effective treatment medications can help patients meet their goals and live full and satisfying lives .

3. What is the right dose?

Finding the right dose is important when treating people with buprenorphine or methadone. The right dose is the amount that allows patients to feel and act normally. It can take days to weeks to find the right dose. The doctor may ask family members to help measure symptoms, including symptoms of withdrawal or symptoms of drowsiness, to adjust the timing and amount of medication. Once the right dose is found, it is important to take it on time every day.

4. How can the family support good treatment?

Buprenorphine and methadone are treatments and not a cure. The best way to help is to encourage regular medical care, encourage to not skip or forget to take the medication and to support long term use of the medication and follow-up in care, just as you would any other chronic disease such as diabetes. It is also important to help with social supports and give encouragement.

• Regular Medical Care: Regular appointments are vital in the treatment of opioid dependence or use disorder. Missing appointments can lead to missed prescriptions or doses and withdrawal symptoms. This can lead to return to use.

• Counseling: These appointments are key parts of treatment and often support a patient’s ability to meet their goals and improve success. Sometimes family members may be asked to join in family therapy sessions to provide additional support.

• Support Groups: Support groups can help build community, which can be healing; however, not all support groups will be welcoming and not all support the use of medication. It may take weeks to find the right group and the right environment. Family members may have their own meetings to support them in adjusting to life with a patient who has become dependent on opioids. It is important that if someone in a support group doesn’t agree with the medical advice your loved one has been given, please consult the medical provider. There is unfortunately still a great deal of stigma associated with the use of medication to treat addiction.

• Taking the Medication: Buprenorphine is an unusual medication in that it must be completely dissolved under the tongue. This process can take 5-10 minutes and the patient should not speak. It is important for family members to be aware of this and allow regular daily dosing times. Methadone must be taken at a regulated clinic called an Opioid Treatment Program or OTP. When a patient starts on this medication, they have to physically go to the clinic every day to be observed taking the medication. Over time, patients can be given more doses to take at home as they stabilize. It is important that family members help patients get to their program daily so they do not miss a dose of medication.

• Storing the Medication: It is very important to find a good and safe place for the medication and to keep it out of reach of children. This medication can be deadly to children. It is also important to keep emergency naloxone, the emergency antidote or treatment for overdose, in the home in case anyone mistakenly takes the medication. Please call 911 or poison control should anyone mistakenly take this medication.

5. What does medication for opioid use disorder treatment mean to the family?

Chronic conditions can be difficult for the patient and his/her/their family. Buprenorphine and methadone can be successful treatments if it is integrated with family support, community, and support for life changes.

Family members may resent the time, effort and money it takes for addiction treatment and counseling. Opioid dependence is just like other chronic diseases like diabetes or high blood pressure. Family counseling and support groups can help families adjust to these changes and make it a successful treatment for everyone involved.

Remember, opioid dependence is not a weakness in character but a disease process. Let’s help our loved ones succeed in treatment!

***In Summary: Family support can be very helpful in patients taking medication for opioid use disorder. It helps if family members understand how substance use disorders are chronic diseases and require ongoing care. It also helps the family to understand how medication works and how it can improve care. For more information, ask to speak with an addiction specialist or your loved one’s medical provider.***