

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PRESCRIBING BUPRENORPHINE

Introduction:

Previously, the College has had a policy outlining expectations for physicians who wish to prescribe Buprenorphine (aka Suboxone). This policy outlined recommended training and education, referenced clinical guidelines, treatment options and other relevant information helpful for the new prescriber.

Knowledge and experience with prescribing buprenorphine has evolved resulting in updated clinical practice guidelines, proven safety of the medication and a modest uptake in prescribing by both methadone prescribers and general physicians. However, the College has received feedback from the members of the Methadone Committee and staff at CAMH that information about buprenorphine in a policy format has unintentionally proven to be a barrier in encouraging more significant numbers of physicians to prescribe the drug.

To that end the College has transitioned information still considered important for members to know when considering prescribing buprenorphine from a policy to this document.

1. Do I need a methadone exemption to prescribe buprenorphine?

No you do not. You are however reminded that as with any drug the College expects that all physicians who wish to use buprenorphine to treat opioid-dependent patients will have the requisite knowledge about its intended impacts, side effects and role in addiction treatment.

Physicians who prescribe buprenorphine are reminded that they must ensure compliance with all relevant College policies, including, but not limited to: Prescribing Drugs and Delegation of Controlled Acts.

2. Is there additional training I could take?

- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) offers the Opioid Dependence Treatment Core Course which: “Prepares physicians, nurses, pharmacists and counsellors/case managers to effectively and safely manage the treatment of clients receiving methadone or buprenorphine opioid dependence. The course is designed to promote interprofessional collaboration among the health care team involved in the delivery of opioid dependence treatment. The core course consists of five online modules and a one-day workshop.”

For more information: http://www.camh.ca/en/education/about/AZCourses/Pages/odtcore_odt.aspx

- CAMH also offers the course: “Buprenorphine-Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence: An Online Course for Front-Line Clinicians”

This course aims to present a framework for providing maintenance treatment for opioid dependence with buprenorphine/naloxone, including its use in a primary care setting. The course walks the learner through the key elements of selecting, preparing, initiating and maintaining a patient with opioid dependence on buprenorphine/naloxone maintenance treatment.

A blend of narrative text, video role-plays, short answer and multiple choice questions frame the course. Excerpts and recommendations are embedded from the CAMH publication, Buprenorphine/Naloxone for Opioid Dependence: Clinical Practice Guideline.

For more information: <http://www.camh.ca/en/education/about/AZCourses/Pages/BUP.aspx>

- Additionally there is an online course specific to prescribing Suboxone available. The **SUBOXONE Education Program** “was developed to provide Canadian healthcare professionals with the pre-requisite education required to treat opiate dependent patients with ^NSUBOXONE[®] buprenorphine (as buprenorphine hydrochloride) and naloxone (as hydrochloride dihydrate).”

For more information: <http://www.suboxonecme.ca/en/login/?t=%2fen%2fhome%2f>

- An additional option for learning could include a one day clinical observership of an opioid-dependency practice and would be of great value for new prescribers.

Lastly, ongoing continuing medical education in opioid-dependency treatment may be helpful as new approaches and research evolve to ensure the most appropriate care is being provided.

3. What guidelines are available?

There are two key documents to assist in appropriate prescribing of buprenorphine. Developed in 2011, the document **Buprenorphine/Naloxone for Opioid Dependence: Clinical Practice Guideline** provides clinical recommendations for the initiation, maintenance and discontinuation of buprenorphine/naloxone maintenance treatment in the ambulatory treatment of adults and adolescents with opioid dependence in Ontario.

This document is available to download at:

http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/policies/guidelines/office/buprenorphine_naloxone_gdlns2011.pdf

In addition, physicians who prescribe buprenorphine will find helpful the current CPSO “**MMT Program Standards and Clinical Guidelines (2011)**”. This document is available to download at:

<http://www.cpso.on.ca/uploadedFiles/members/MMT-Guidelines.pdf>

4. Should I get my methadone exemption?

While not a requirement, physicians who wish to treat opioid dependence could obtain a section 56 exemption permitting them to prescribe methadone for opioid dependence. Being able to prescribe both buprenorphine and methadone increases treatment options, and helps ensure patients can receive the most appropriate care for their dependency. Information about obtaining a methadone exemption is available from the CPSO Methadone Program at (416)967-2661 or 1-800-268-7096 ext.661.

Methadone Exemption Application: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/precurs/meth_on-eng.php

5. What other resources are available?

Additional resources are available through CAMH.

http://www.camh.ca/en/education/about/camh_publications/Pages/methadone_maintenance_physicians.aspx

These include:

- [Order Methadone Maintenance: A Physician's Guide to Treatment, 2nd Edition](#)
- [Methadone Maintenance Treatment: Best Practices in Case Management](#)
- [Methadone Maintenance Treatment: Client Handbook](#)
- [Psychiatry in Primary Care](#)
- [Addiction Toolkit: Opioid Misuse and Addiction](#)
- [Methadone overview on CAMH Knowledge Exchange](#)
- [Prescription Opioid Advice](#)