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### **Buprenorphine Treatment of Opioid Addiction Patient Information**

Addiction medicine doctors consider addiction to be a chronic illness and treat it accordingly. Buprenorphine is one of the medications that can be used to treat opioid addiction. Opioids are drugs like heroin, opium, codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, etc., which can be abused and lead to tolerance and dependence. This means that the user's body becomes accustomed to ever-higher amounts, and when the drug is stopped, there are symptoms of withdrawal. Even after the worst physical part of the withdrawal is over, some patients still don't feel "right" for a long time and may relapse to using drugs again, just to "feel normal". Some medical research shows that after abusing drugs for a long time, the brain is thrown off balance and the goal of treatment is to encourage stability, both in the body and in the patient's life.

Not all patients who abuse opioids need medication to treat their addiction. Many addicted persons do very well with counseling, residential therapeutic treatment, or in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) groups. For some patients these measures alone are not enough to keep the person stable so maintenance medications may be used. Maintenance medication has a slower onset of action and a longer duration of effects on the brain than heroin or other drugs of abuse. This allows for a steadying of the brain function that is so important to treatment. The goal of Buprenorphine in maintenance treatment is for you and the doctor to find the correct dose where you feel normal and to maintain you on that dose. This means that you will be required to take the medication on a regular schedule as prescribed by the doctor.

Besides Buprenorphine, there are two other maintenance medications that are used to treat opioid addiction: methadone and LAAM. These medications are also long acting and work by stabilizing the brain. These medications are given in specially licensed clinics called Opioid Treatment Clinics (often called Methadone Maintenance Clinics), and their use is carefully regulated by the Federal Government and state agencies.

Buprenorphine is also bound by some regulations. An important difference with Buprenorphine is that patient's can receive a prescription for it from their doctor's office – they don't need to go to a special clinic. Because there are regulations for the use of Buprenorphine, patient's taking this medication are asked to do things like give urine for random drug testing or bring their pills in for a pill count.

Buprenorphine will be started when you are experiencing the symptoms of withdrawal. The dose is adjusted over the first several days of treatment. Buprenorphine is a pill that dissolves under the tongue. The pills also have Naloxone (Narcan) in them, which is an opioid antagonist. The purpose of naloxone is to discourage illicit injection of the pill. **If you dissolve and inject this pill, you will experience significant opioid withdrawal.**

What happens if Buprenorphine treatment doesn't work?

Buprenorphine treatment may be discontinued for several reasons. These are a few examples:

- Buprenorphine controls withdrawal symptoms and is an excellent maintenance treatment for many patients, but some patients may need a stronger maintenance medication. If you are unable to control your heroin abuse, or if you continue to feel like using, even at the highest dose of Buprenorphine, then the doctor may advise you to transfer to methadone or LAAM at a clinic licensed to give those treatments.
- There are certain rules and patient agreements that are part of your treatment with Buprenorphine at New Jersey Pain Management, PA. You will be asked to sign these documents upon acceptance into the program. If you do not keep these agreements, you may be discharged from the program or referred to an inpatient treatment program.
- Prompt payment of fees is part of Buprenorphine treatment. If you cannot pay your fees, you must discuss this with the business manager. If no agreement can be reached or you still cannot pay, you will be discharged from Buprenorphine treatment.
- Dangerous or inappropriate behavior that is disruptive to the office or to other patients will result in discharge from Buprenorphine treatment. This includes patients who come to the office intoxicated or high. **In the case of dangerous behavior, you will be immediately discharged and asked not to return.**
- Obviously, in the rare case of an allergic reaction to the medication, it has to be discontinued.

The usual method of ending treatment is a taper, which means gradually decreasing the dose of Buprenorphine over a period of several weeks. The length of time over which you are taken off of the medication depends on your maintenance dose. After this time, you will no longer be an enrolled patient and your treatment slot will be used for another patient.