

Prescribing opioid agonist treatment in primary care: Experiences of primary care providers in Nova Scotia

Category: Poster Presentation (In-Person)

Abstract Body

Introduction – Opioid agonist treatment (OAT) is a highly effective treatment for opioid use disorder. However, for reasons such as long waitlists, distance to OAT programs, and stigma towards substance use the accessibility of OAT has been limited in many communities across North America, including the province of Nova Scotia. In North America, OAT has primarily been prescribed through specialized opioid treatment programs, with some OAT prescribed in primary care settings. Relatively little is known about the perspectives and experiences of physicians and nurse practitioners who prescribe OAT in primary care in Nova Scotia.

Methods -This qualitative study sought to understand the experiences of providers prescribing OAT in Nova Scotia to help identify the influences on the decision to prescribe OAT, how barriers may be addressed, and how to support OAT prescribing in primary care. Data were collected through eight one-on-one, semi-structured telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted from January 2021 to July 2021, and were approximately 45-90 minutes in duration. For this narrative inquiry, data were analyzed using a narrative paradigmatic analysis.

Results - Analysis identified key influences on the decision to prescribe OAT, such as an interest in prescribing OAT, a need for access to OAT, proximity to mentors, work expectations, and peer support. Participants described how they prepared to prescribe OAT, the positive aspects of prescribing, what made it difficult to prescribe and what made it easier to prescribe OAT. Participants identified key recommendations to help support OAT prescribing, such as incorporating substance use education and training into medical and nursing curricula.

Conclusion – Prescribing OAT in primary care can be rewarding and enjoy. There are some system challenges that make it difficult to prescribe OAT in primary care as well as some supports which can make it easier to prescribe OAT in primary care. A key finding of this study was that substance use education and training are critical to support family physicians and primary care nurse practitioners to prescribe OAT, with mentors available to help provide support.

Key Words (Max 5)

- Opiate Agonist Therapy
- Primary Care
- Substance Use Disorders (general)

Learning Objective #1

Increase awareness that prescribing OAT in primary care can be a positive and enjoyable experience.

Learning Objective #2

Attendees will be able to identify some challenges as well as some supports of OAT prescribing in primary care.

Reference #1

Dooley, J., Asbridge, M., Fraser, J. & Kirkland, S. (2012). Physicians' attitudes towards office-based delivery of methadone maintenance therapy: Results from a cross-sectional survey of Nova Scotia primary care physicians. *Harm Reduction Journal* 9(20), 1-9.

Reference #2

Hutchinson E., Caitlin, M., Andrilla, C. H. A., Baldwin, L. & Rosenblatt, R. (2014). Barriers to primary care physicians prescribing buprenorphine. *Annals of Family Medicine* 12(2), 128-133.

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