

26th March 2020

Dear Pharmacists

The current COVID-19 pandemic is creating new challenges for healthcare. The opioid pharmacotherapy¹ treatment system has been identified as a priority area.

I write to you from the [Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network](#), a state-funded initiative working to support the opioid pharmacotherapy system, led by South Eastern Melbourne PHN and Eastern Melbourne PHN.

During this time it is likely that health professionals will need to work in different ways to ensure continuity of treatment for pharmacotherapy patients and associated supports for prescribers and pharmacies providing pharmacotherapy.

Roster of alternate pharmacotherapy-dispensing pharmacies

One such strategy is the creation of a 'Roster of alternate pharmacotherapy-dispensing pharmacies'. This is a place-based response in the event of a pharmacy becoming unable to continue patient care.

In such a situation it may be necessary to nominate an alternate local pharmacy(ies) which is willing and able to temporarily take on the pharmacotherapy patient load to ensure continuity of treatment. Therefore we are asking you, as a pharmacotherapy-dispensing pharmacy, to engage with other local pharmacotherapy pharmacies and create a dispensing support network in the event that a pharmacy is unable to provide pharmacotherapy to their patients.

Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network is available to assist you to establish these support networks.

Prescriptions – reduce need for patient attendance at practice and pharmacy

Another strategy is to lengthen script validity and minimise the number of patient visits to the pharmacy. We have asked prescribers to consider increasing the duration of pharmacotherapy scripts (up to a maximum of 6 months) and to increase the number of take-aways where clinically appropriate. To minimise associated risk we ask that you work closely with the prescriber about the patient's progress with treatment.

Experts are working together to create resources to support pharmacies providing pharmacotherapy during these exceptional times.

Other key messages:

- There is ample pharmacotherapy stock – please reassure patients if they are concerned
- PAMS has developed COVID-19 recommendations for pharmacotherapy consumers, available on www.hrvic.org.au/covid19-methadone-suboxone-treatment – please print and display this information in your dosing area and direct patients to this website

¹ Opioid pharmacotherapy, also referred to as Opioid Replacement Therapy and Medication Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence, involves the use of methadone, buprenorphine or buprenorphine-naloxone for the treatment of opioid dependence.

- If you stock Naloxone which can be provided free to the patient under the government subsidy, supply it to each pharmacotherapy patient. If not, encourage prescribers to provide a PBS script
- It is advisable to ensure your records of patient phone numbers are up-to-date in the event of unexpected pharmacy closure

This is a rapidly evolving situation, but rest assured we will continue to try to mitigate any challenges and will keep you informed at all times.

If you have any queries regarding this or any other pharmacotherapy matters, please feel free to contact me or your local Pharmacotherapy Liaison Coordinator:

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Kind Regards,



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Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network
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