

PHARMACIST'S ROLE IN TREATING OPIOID DEPENDENCE



SafeScript is enabling pharmacists to play a more active role in the early identification of patients with opioid dependence. **Pharmacotherapy**, also referred to as Medication-Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence (MATOD) or Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT), is an effective evidence-based treatment for opioid dependence which all pharmacies are encouraged to offer.

Support with pharmacotherapy

The **Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network** provides support to pharmacies in Southern and Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne, including assistance and advice with best practice pharmacotherapy program delivery, such as:

- Setting up a pharmacotherapy program in your pharmacy
- Required approval, training and education
- Required equipment, consumables, dosing records and processes
- Managing complex patients and unusual scenarios

Accredited pharmacotherapy training for Pharmacists

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) is the approved pharmacotherapy training provider for pharmacists. Training is **free** for all pharmacists and pharmacy assistants (PSA members and non-members). It consists of two parts and is available online or face-to-face.

Visit bit.ly/psavopp or contact the PSA for more information.

Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network events

Community of Practice Events

Multidisciplinary events that focus on pharmacotherapy and Alcohol and other Drugs, with presentations from local Addiction Medicine Specialists and other experts.

Peer Group Learning meetings

Peer-based educational meetings facilitated by local pharmacists experienced in providing pharmacotherapy. Sessions address specific learning needs of pharmacists. Self-recorded CPD points apply.

Resources and Supports

- Contact us or visit www.A4PN.org.au/resources
- Call the Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service (DACAS) on 1800 812 804 for 24/7 specialist clinical advice
- Join our mailing list! Email A4PN@semphn.org.au to register.

WHY SHOULD I PROVIDE PHARMACOTHERAPY IN MY PHARMACY?

Long term prescription opioid use for chronic pain has increased in recent years, along with a corresponding increase in opioid dependence

Pharmacists play a crucial role in destigmatising and normalising opioid dependence and pharmacotherapy

Providing pharmacotherapy is professionally rewarding

Help to improve your patients' quality of life

Build long-term relationships with patients by actively engaging in their recovery

Aid in clinical decisions through regular collaboration with prescribers and effective responses to SafeScript

Develop skills and knowledge about substance use disorders, including early identification of at-risk patients



CONTACT US

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10 TIPS FOR RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE ORT PROGRAM

1 Enjoy!

Pharmacotherapy, or Opioid Replacement Therapy (ORT), is a professionally rewarding area to work in, where you can make a real difference. First and foremost, enjoy it!

2 Understanding

Consider ORT patients in the same way as any other patient with a chronic relapsing disease (like asthma or diabetes) and remember you are dealing with a medical condition. Substance use disorder or opioid dependence should not be characterised as a moral, ethical or criminal dilemma by the pharmacist or doctor. Remember, it's not your role to judge.

3 Show respect

Treat your patients on ORT with the same respect you treat all other patients, and the same respect you would expect to receive. This is not a throw away line, think about it and avoid adding to the stigma of being on an ORT program. This can completely change the relationship you create with your patients and potentially lead to better therapeutic outcomes. When other customers don't understand ORT take the time to explain the difference between being in treatment compared to not, for someone with a dependence on opioids.

4 Use time effectively

Spend your time with patients productively. You are in a privileged position, often seeing a patient daily, more often than they see their doctor or visit the supermarket! If patients are willing to chat, use this time to share what you know about addiction and take the opportunity to learn more about their experience of the condition. Enjoy the difference you can make in someone's life. It can be the difference between life and death for someone living with an opioid dependence and helping improve someone's life is the ultimate experience.

5 Establish trust

Ask open-ended questions. Not every day but when time and circumstances are right. You might start to get more information from the patient and trust makes a huge difference. "What's on today? How are you feeling on this dose? What hobbies are you or were you interested in?" Part of your responsibility as a pharmacist is to counsel. Our role is not just to hand over methadone or buprenorphine, a vending machine could do that.

6 Program agreement

When you induct a new patient be clear about your pharmacy's policies and how you intend to administer the program. On the first day of treatment at your pharmacy all patients should be issued with an agreement that outlines the program guidelines. Give the patient a few days to read this agreement and return a signed copy to you, allowing them time to reflect on the document and clarify any questions they may have. It's a useful exercise to write this

yourself and make it a living document that changes with your experience. Make sure you use caring and respectful language. Include very clear payment details and points like your policy on take-away doses. The PSA and Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network have an agreement template you can start with.

7 Behavioural guidelines

Just like for any other patient at your pharmacy, be clear about conduct. If you consider someone's behaviour to be disruptive then explain your expectations respectfully, reminding them that you treat them with respect (make sure this is the case) and you expect the same in return.

8 Keep appropriate records

For patient safety and improved therapeutic outcomes, keep a clear chronological record of events (good and bad) in each patient's file. These notes are not kept secret from the patient and should be written in a professional and respectful way. At any stage they can be read by other interested parties (e.g. doctor or coroner). Keep a separate ORT communication book for pharmacists to use, which is not intended for patients to read. This book may contain more sensitive information that may need to be kept private.

9 Professional development

Keep your knowledge of substance use disorders and ORT pharmacology up to date. To support your patients effectively it is essential you understand the pharmacology of illicit and licit drug treatments, and how it feels to be a person experiencing a substance use disorder. This will give you the opportunity to dispel many myths and improve outcomes. The program will start to become professionally rewarding. Understand the correct and appropriate doses and discuss this with the patient and doctor as necessary and appropriate. Ask the patient questions like "Is this dose holding you? How long ago did you last use other opioids? How are you feeling on this treatment?"

10 Educate all your staff

Discuss the program with all your staff. Make sure your pharmacists and shop staff understand the aim of ORT – it's a maintenance harm minimisation program with huge benefits to patients and the community. Their non-judgmental attitude is essential to the program's success – include them! Discuss issues like providing syringes and running the service. It takes time. Starting ORT does not ensure abstinence from other drugs on day one, or ever for some patients. If your expectations are not well-informed or realistic you will be disappointed and frustrated.

10 Tips was written by Community Pharmacist Angelo Pricolo, in collaboration with PAMS Program Manager Sarah Lord and Jana Dostal from the Area 4 Pharmacotherapy Network. All are members of the PSA Harm Minimisation Committee.