Title: The Pharmacy Access to Resources and Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (PhARM-OUD) Guideline

Abstract: Buprenorphine is the only agonist medication for opioid use disorder that may be dispensed directly to patients from a community pharmacy pursuant to a prescription from any Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) licensed prescriber in all fifty states. The potential accessibility, efficacy, and relative safety of buprenorphine makes it an ideal therapeutic option for the management of opioid use disorder. Still, around half of community pharmacies in the United States do not maintain buprenorphine in their inventory. Community pharmacists must contend with a convoluted meshwork of state and federal laws and regulations that complicate the wholesale purchase and dispensing of buprenorphine. Additionally, stigma toward persons with opioid use disorder often interferes with the quality of care delivered at the pharmacy counter. Prevailing clinical practice guidelines for the medical management of OUD do not address the complexities of pharmacy practice, creating a clear and present need for direct pharmacist guidance.

The Pharmacy Access to Resources and Medication for Opioid Use Disorder Guideline was created to provide actionable steps to improve access to buprenorphine in community pharmacies. A steering committee led by the National Community Pharmacists Association, National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, and the University of Houston College of Pharmacy recruited and empaneled a 22-member expert panel to draft and refine recommendations to address barriers to buprenorphine dispensing identified through focus group interviews with community pharmacist in Texas, California, and West Virginia.

The panel's recommendations were generated through a four-round, Delphi process that occurred between November 2023 and March, 2024. Nine main recommendations and 35 supporting recommendations were generated. After drafting the document, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy hosted a public comment period between April 15, 2024, and June 1, 2024. A second, thirteen-member review panel was convened to revise the recommendations at the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy headquarters in Mount Prospect, Illinois on June 11, 2024.

The central message of the final document, which was endorsed by several leading medicine, pharmacy, and advocacy organizations, is that pharmacists should dispense buprenorphine under most circumstances pursuant to a valid prescription from a DEA licensed prescriber. The document urges caution in applying quantitative thresholds to buprenorphine dispensing decisions and encourages pharmacists to rely on their professional judgement rather than arbitrary decision rules designed to reduce liability at the cost of patient health and safety. In many parts, the guidance reminds pharmacists that OUD is a chronic disease that responds to medical management. Community pharmacists and pharmacies are encouraged to incorporate this guidance into their practice to ensure that they are adequately meeting the needs of the patients that they serve.

URL: https://nabp.pharmacy/buprenorphine-guidelines/

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