

## A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

### *Despite Some Obstacles, Physicians Still Optimistic About Prescribing Buprenorphine to Opiate-Addicted Patients*

In October 2002, buprenorphine was approved by the FDA as a medication to treat opiate-addicted patients in an outpatient setting. Qualified physicians were able to start prescribing Subutex® and Suboxone®, two types of buprenorphine, effective May 22, 2003. Join Together, a project of the Boston University School of Public Health, recently conducted a telephone poll of physicians qualified to prescribe these drugs. Two-thirds of the physicians polled have treated patients with either Subutex® (9%), Suboxone® (34%), or both drugs (23%). The remaining 34% of the physicians polled had not yet prescribed buprenorphine. Following are some of the barriers to prescribing the drugs:

- The most common complaint by physicians was that they had a difficult time finding pharmacies that carried either drug. One physician remarked, “I wish there was a way of educating pharmacies because so few are aware of the drug, which makes it hard to get” (p. 4).
- Problems with federal, state, and local regulations were the second most common barrier. For example, federal law limits physicians to prescribing buprenorphine to no more than thirty patients. One doctor reports “having to turn away dozens of patients” because he had reached his limit (p. 3).
- Costs and a lack of insurance coverage were other limitations that physicians cited as barriers to prescribing Subutex® or Suboxone®. One physician stated, “Some [patients] find it so difficult or so expensive that they give up and resume opiate use” (p. 3).

The authors conclude, “Although many obstacles still prevent widespread buprenorphine use for addiction treatment, it appears as though availability and use are headed in an encouraging direction. Most physicians seem optimistic about buprenorphine, and many of the physicians who are not yet prescribing indicated that they planned to start treating patients with the medication soon” (p. 7). More information about buprenorphine is available online at <http://buprenorphine.samhsa.gov>.

NOTES: The physicians polled were those listed in an on-line directory maintained by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [http://buprenorphine.samhsa.gov/bwns\\_locator/index.html](http://buprenorphine.samhsa.gov/bwns_locator/index.html). The physicians were contacted via phone, email, and fax over the months of June and July 2003. Of the 863 physicians listed on the SAMHSA web site, 419 agreed to participate in the poll (a 53% response rate).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from “National Poll of Physicians on Barriers to Widespread Buprenorphine Use,” *Join Together*, October 2003. Available online at <http://www.jointogether.org/sa/files/pdf/bupereport.pdf>.

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