

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

University of Maryland, College Park

### *Drug Users, Treatment Providers, and Law Enforcement Officers Describe Increasing Suboxone® Misuse in Ohio*

Since 1999, the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network (OSAM) has been monitoring local substance abuse trends. Their most recent report, covering January to June 2011, indicates that the “availability of Suboxone® remains high in all regions, with the exception of Toledo where it remains moderately available” (p. 4). Obtaining Suboxone is described by another user as “super easy; Like candy machines, a dime a dozen” (p. 33). According to a treatment provider, Suboxone “is becoming easier to get than methadone” (p. 17). Following is a summary of Suboxone use in Ohio, in the words of users (U), treatment providers (TP), and law enforcement officers (LE). For more information on Suboxone (buprenorphine), see the *CESAR FAX Special Series: Buprenorphine*, available online at <http://www.cesar.umd.edu>.

**How Is Suboxone Obtained?** “You’ve got people at [12-step] meetings handing them [Suboxone] off. They’re being sold like any other drug” (TP, p. 4). “When they prescribe it ..., they prescribe a lot of it, and people don’t use the whole prescription. They [users] would then sell it on the street” (LE, p. 82). “They’re [heroin addicts] getting Suboxone and turning around and selling it” (U, p. 66). “People pick up prescriptions [for Suboxone] and call [their dealer] and sell them” (U, p. 66). “The dealers will give them [users] a free Suboxone with their heroin. Customer satisfaction.” (TP, p. 82).

#### **Why Is Suboxone Used?**

**Fight Withdrawal:** “[Some users] don’t want to get off [opioids] for good. They just want to not be sick, so they have Suboxone stashed away for when they feel sick” (TP, p. 115). “They [opiate addicts] use it ... like Tylenol 3®, to use till they can get a fix. [Suboxone is] a drug of convenience” (TP, p. 83). “Some start off using it ... to assist with withdrawal, but find that they like how it feels and become addicted” (TP, p. 34). “I quartered them [Suboxone] ... to take the bare minimum, so I wouldn’t be sick, but that way I could still use an opiate; I would buy them ... to come off other stuff, but it never worked that way. ‘Cuz you could get high off Suboxone if you hadn’t had any opiates in a couple of days ... If you are addicted to opiates, you take the smallest piece of Suboxone—it makes you feel normal” (U, p. 133).

**Get High:** “If you are clean [opioid free], you will get very high from Suboxone” (U, p. 17). “For a buzz ... can snort Suboxone, as long as you don’t have other opiates in the system” (U, p. 50). “If you are not addicted to opiates and you take a Suboxone, it’s very, very strong. It can make you high for three days” (U, p. 133). “People ... will use Xanax® a half-hour before Suboxone and will get high. Some clients say the effects are as good as, or better than, that of OxyContin®” (TP, p. 17). “[A] lot of people are being introduced to opioids through Suboxone now because, if they were not Suboxone users, the buprenorphine ... the active agent in Suboxone is giving them the opiate effect, and now they’re looking for stronger opioids. So now it’s ... a gateway drug to opioid addiction” (TP, p. 133).

**Avoid Detection:** “Participants also reported that individuals who need to avoid detection of drug use on urine drug screens (probationers) use Suboxone because it is often not screened” (Report, p. 4). “[Suboxone is] the institutional drug of choice” (U, p. 17).

**How Is Suboxone Being Used?** “People typically put them ... under their tongue, or they chew them up. I’ve actually witnessed a couple people shoot [inject] them up; I would eat the full 8 mg Suboxone” (U, p. 132). “I snorted it ... when I would take it. It made me not sick” (U, p. 132). “Well, I shoot [Suboxone] in my neck, so, um, it goes straight to you, you know” (U, p. 133). “I do know a few people that when switched to the films [Suboxone strips], they say that those are a lot easier to shoot up [inject]. Yeah, ‘cause they dissolve in water; they dissolve completely, and I’ve heard people say that those actually work really well” (U, p. 133).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, *Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network: Surveillance of Drug Abuse Trends in the State of Ohio, January-June 2011*, 2011. Available online at <http://www.odadas.state.oh.us/public/OsamHome.aspx>.