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**What Are Opioids?**

Opioids (also called opiates) are drugs or medications that affect parts of the brain that impact such things as our mood, feelings of pleasure, wakefulness, or sensitivity to pain. Some opioids, such as Vicodin, codeine, morphine, and Percocet, are made by pharmaceutical companies and can be prescribed legally to treat pain, coughs, or other symptoms. These prescription medications may, however, be sold or traded illegally. Other opioids, such as heroin and opium, come from the poppy plant and are not used as a lawful medicine. Still others may be made in illegal laboratories in unhealthy conditions and are dangerous to use, such as illegally made fentanyl.

**What Is an Opioid Use Disorder?**

Taking opioids or opiates often—whether they are prescribed legally or bought on the street—can cause changes in the brain, making it difficult for some people to stop using the drug. These changes can lead to withdrawal symptoms, in which some people feel physically ill or in pain when they stop taking opioids. They can also lead to cravings, in which some people cannot stop thinking about the drug or feel strong urges to use it. Some people may also feel depressed, bored, or irritable when they stop taking the drug, or they may no longer get pleasure or happiness from things that should make them joyful, such as tasting good food or enjoying the company of loved ones.

When these symptoms become severe, it can be very difficult for some people to stop taking opioids and may get in the way of other healthy parts of their life, like keeping a job, taking care of children, or driving a car safely. We call this opioid dependence, opioid addiction, or a severe opioid use disorder.

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Participant Brochure

**Medications for   
Opioid Use Disorder**

Please read this brochure if you or a loved one wants to learn about medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), are currently receiving MOUD, or have been assessed by staff in the treatment court as possibly needing MOUD.

Please feel free to discuss this information with your therapist or counselor, the treatment court judge, the defense lawyer on the treatment court team, your private defense lawyer if you have one, or any other person(s) you trust.

If you want more information about MOUD or are interested in starting treatment, please talk with any member of the treatment court team, or bring it up during your next court hearing, treatment session, or other appointment in the treatment court.

BACK COVER

COULD BE A LIST OF PROVIDERS

**What Is MOUD?**

Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) are used, along with counseling and therapy, to treat some of the symptoms of opioid use disorder, such as withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Some medications may also lower the ability of opioids to cause intoxication or make a person feel “high.”

Taking these medications makes it easier for people to pay attention in counseling, follow the rules of the treatment court, and perform their daily chores and activities. Over time, the medications may also help to heal some of the changes in the brain, leading to better health and functioning.

Three types of medications have been shown to work for treating opioid use disorders and are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the federal agency that decides whether medications are safe and work well:

1. **Methadone.** Methadone is usually taken as a pill or liquid mixed in juice. When taken in the right dose and amount, it greatly reduces withdrawal symptoms and cravings without causing intoxication. It can help people with opioid disorders feel more comfortable so they can concentrate better in counseling and perform daily chores. If a person takes other opioids like heroin, it can also block or lessen the effects of those opioids on the brain, thus preventing the person from getting “high.”

People need to go to a special clinic or program on most days to take methadone for opioid use disorder. After a while, they may be able to have “take-home” doses, so they do not need to go to the clinic every day.

Methadone can have side effects that may be serious. Your doctor or medical provider will discuss these side effects with you, tell you how to deal with them, and decide together with you whether methadone may be the right medication for you.

1. **Buprenorphine.** Buprenorphine is usually taken as a pill or as a thin tape or film that melts slowly under your tongue or inside your cheek. It is best known by brand names such as Suboxone or Subutex. It can also be taken in a once-a-month injection, called Sublocade. Not all programs use the injectable medication, but many use the kind you take by mouth.

Like methadone, buprenorphine lessens withdrawal symptoms, cravings, and the effects of other opioids on the brain. This makes people with opioid disorders feel more comfortable and able to concentrate on their daily activities. It is less likely than methadone to cause side effects and does not need to be prescribed or taken at a special clinic or program. Many doctors and other medical providers, such as nurse practitioners or physician’s assistants, can prescribe it from their office, and you can get it from nearly any drugstore or pharmacy with a prescription.

Your doctor or medical provider will talk with you about whether buprenorphine is likely to work for you and whether it may be the right medication for you.

1. **Naltrexone.** Naltrexone is taken once a day or three times a week as a pill or as a once-a-month injection called Vivitrol. Although it can have some side effects, they tend to be mild and are rarely dangerous. Naltrexone can be prescribed by any physician or trained medical provider and does not require a special clinic or program. It can reduce cravings for opioids and blocks the effects of opioids on the brain, which can stop a person from getting “high.” However, it does not reduce withdrawal symptoms. You must first stop taking all opioids for at least 7 to 10 days before you can start taking naltrexone or you will experience severe withdrawal discomfort. You should not take naltrexone if you are taking lawfully prescribed opioid medication for pain or other medical problems.

Your doctor or medical provider will talk with you about whether naltrexone or Vivitrol may be the right medication for you.

**Preventing or Reversing Overdose**

You should also know about another medicine called naloxone or Narcan. Narcan is not used to treat opioid use disorders but is used in case of an emergency to stop an overdose on opioids. It can be given as a shot by trained professionals or squirted into the nose by people without medical training who have been shown how to use it.

Most cities or states have laws allowing people to keep naloxone with them and use it in case of an emergency. Check with the treatment court or your treatment provider about receiving training in using naloxone and getting a naloxone kit.

[OPTIONAL IF APPLICABLE: The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Treatment Court offers training in how to use Narcan to save another person’s life and provides free kits that you and your loved ones can keep with you and use in the event of a life-threatening overdose emergency.]

**Can I Take MOUD While Enrolled in Treatment Court?**

The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Treatment Court is committed to providing safe and effective treatments for opioid use disorders while also protecting your welfare, the welfare of other participants, and public safety. Therefore, you are allowed to take MOUD when it is approved by the treatment court team and prescribed legally by a physician or other medical provider who has personally examined you and will continue to meet with you to see how you are doing. Whether or not you take MOUD, you will receive all of the same treatment and other services as other people in the program and will get the same benefits from graduating.

Choosing whether or not to use MOUD, which medication to use, and the safest and best dosage are decisions to be made by you and your doctor or medical care provider. The treatment court team is here to help you in this decision and to provide other services you may need, such as counseling and education. The treatment court team will also keep an eye on you to be sure you are using the medication in the right way and are following your physician’s advice. If you use the medication unsafely or attempt to share it with anyone else, you may receive sanctions in the program, just as you would for violating other rules of the program.

**How Do I Get Started?**

If you want more information about MOUD or are thinking about starting treatment, you may speak with any member of the treatment court team or bring it up during your next court hearing, treatment session, or other appointment in the treatment court.

You will then meet with a therapist or counselor for a screening to see if MOUD might be good for you. The therapist or counselor will talk to you about your past use of opioids, how opioid use may have affected your life, and whether you have medical or other problems that might cause you serious problems if you take certain medications.

If the results from the screening suggest that MOUD might work for you, you will then meet with a physician or other medical provider for a more careful physical exam. You and the physician or medical provider will decide together what treatment to take.

Nothing you say about opioid use or other substance use during these meetings will be used against you. You will not be prosecuted or sanctioned for your past use of opioids or other drugs. The only reason for these talks is to decide whether MOUD is likely to work and be safe for you.

The treatment court team will be told about the medication decision and will check in with you during counseling sessions, court hearings, and other appointments to see how you are doing and to help you with any problems you may be having. The treatment court team will also stay in touch with your doctor to see how you are doing and to make sure you are following your treatment plan.

**Must I Stop MOUD to Graduate from Treatment Court?**

Choosing whether or not to lower the dosage or stop taking MOUD is a medical decision that you and your doctor will make. You will not need to stop taking MOUD to graduate from treatment court if you and your doctor think it should continue after you leave. You will receive the same legal and other benefits for graduating from the treatment court as any other person in the program.

Please feel free to talk to any member of the treatment court team to learn more about MOUD and see if it may help you on your road to recovery and a healthy, productive life.