



Medicines that Treat Opioid Addiction Remain Vastly Underused in the US

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The nation's top medical advisers recently reported that the medicines that are proven to treat opioid addiction remain vastly underused in the US. According to a report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, only a few people who need them get medicines for addiction.

The medical group says that only a fraction of the estimated 2 million people addicted to opioids are getting the medications they need in order to recover safely.

The group, which advises the federal government, called for increased prescribing of the proven and tested drugs, among other significant changes. The group aims to reduce the barriers that are keeping patients from using medicines.

In 2017, opioids were involved in nearly 48,000 deaths. This is an unnerving record, knowing that many patients get their opioids via prescription. In recent years, however, there have been more deaths involving illicit opioids such as heroin and Fentanyl. Compared to the prescription forms of opioids—including oxycodone and codeine—illicit opioids are now more commonly abused.

Government-approved medications exist, but there are barriers that prevent people from using them. Methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone have all proven useful in the battle against the opioid epidemic. They help control cravings and withdrawal symptoms that cause people to relapse. These medications help keep nausea, muscle aches, and pain, which are usually experienced when trying to quit a drug that someone is dependent on.

While their use is backed by most doctors and medical groups, they still have skeptics, especially among supporters of 12-step programs that favor abstinence-only approaches. These groups think that if medications are used to help control cravings, then the patient is only replacing one addiction with another.

But patients who take the medicines have also shown to fare better over the long term and are 50 percent less likely to die than if they were not taking them.

The group's findings echo similar reports from the US Surgeon General, and a presidential commission appointed to President Donald Trump.

Addiction experts agree that there are a few key reasons why these medications are underutilized in the US, despite the opioid epidemic. The number one reason is a stigma. The misunderstanding about the nature of addiction and the failure to recognize it as a medical condition continues to prevent patients from getting better.

Two of the medications used to treat opioid addiction—methadone and buprenorphine—are opioids themselves. The group said that this contributes to the mistaken belief that using these for treatment is just substituting one drug for another.

Experts said that the medications are given at doses big enough to fend off withdrawal, but too small to produce a euphoric high. [Click the link to see Aurora's top rehab placement programs.](#)

There are also regulations that limit the use of these helpful medications. For example, methadone can only be given at government-regulated clinics. This can require patients to commute. Buprenorphine can only be prescribed by certified health professionals who must complete eight hours of training.

The group also noted that medications are often unavailable to prison inmates. The report concludes there's no scientific basis for such limitations.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every

individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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