

March 6, 2014

Dear Colleagues:

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment is pleased to announce the release of two important documents that are designed to reduce the risk of opioid overdose and death.

First, an expert panel convened by the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), at SAMHSA's request, has published a series of recommendations for initiating medication-assisted treatment with methadone. SAMHSA and ASAM took this step in response to data showing that the majority of methadone-related overdoses and deaths among patients in Federally certified opioid treatment programs (OTPs) occur during the first several weeks of treatment. SAMHSA therefore asked the ASAM expert panel to develop recommendations to reduce the risk of patient overdose or death related to initiation of methadone maintenance therapy.

The resulting document reflects an exhaustive review of the literature, as well as the extensive experience of the experts who joined the panel.\* The panel's findings and recommendations also were reviewed by more than 100 leaders in addiction treatment. The full article, "Safe Methadone Induction and Stabilization: Report of an Expert Panel," can be found in the *Journal of Addiction Medicine* (November/December 2013, Volume 7, Issue 6, pages 377-386).

Second, with support from SAMHSA, the Community Care Behavioral Health Organization (Community Care), the Institute for Research, Education and Training in Addictions (IRETA), and the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral and Intellectual Disability Services (DBHIDS) has released guidelines for "Management of Benzodiazepines in Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)." The guidelines address the fact that concurrent use of benzodiazepines has been reported in a significant proportion of opioid-related overdoses and deaths.

The guidelines present best practices in seven categories: (1) general guidelines, (2) assessment for MAT, (3) addressing benzodiazepine use, (4) MAT for patients who engage in concurrent benzodiazepine use, (5) noncompliance with the treatment agreement, (6) risk management/assessment of impairment, and (7) special circumstances. The complete guidelines can be accessed on the Community Care website at [www.ccbh.com/bestpractices](http://www.ccbh.com/bestpractices).

For additional information about these important documents, please contact SAMHSA Medical Advisor Anthony Campbell, R.Ph., D.O. at (240) 276-2702 or email him at [Anthony.Campbell@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:Anthony.Campbell@samhsa.hhs.gov).

Sincerely,

[Signed by H. Westley Clark, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., CAS,  
FASAM.]

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Director  
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\*The panel was chaired by Louis E. Baxter, Sr., M.D., FASAM, with members Anthony B. Campbell, R.Ph., D.O.; Michael DeShields, M.D.; Petros Levounis, M.D., M.S., FASAM; Judith A. Martin, M.D.; Laura McNicholas, M.D., Ph.D.; J. Thomas Payte, M.D.; Edwin A. Salsitz, M.D.; and Trusandra Taylor, M.D., M.P.H.