

Drugs and poisons unit newsletter

May 2003



Buprenorphine Diversion

Despite ongoing directives from the Drugs and Poisons Unit for pharmacists to crush all buprenorphine doses, police continue to apprehend people in possession of, or attempting to sell, unapproved take-away or diverted doses. Aside from the legal issues, the injection of buprenorphine, especially when contaminated with oral flora, can cause considerable tissue damage. While crushing doses doesn't eliminate diversion altogether, it does make it more difficult and the incidence of diversion appears to have decreased since more pharmacists have begun routinely crushing. Please note that it is preferable not to crush tablets to a fine powder. Many pharmacists use a mortar and pestle to break the tablets into small pieces in a disposable cup, and then give the cup to the client so the contents can be tipped directly under the tongue.

Do remind clients that small pieces mean shorter waiting time for absorption.

Once again we advise that doctors should not comply with patient requests to write "do not crush" on buprenorphine scripts, nor should pharmacists be persuaded not to crush.

Some procedural strategies to provide time for buprenorphine to be absorbed include:

- Have clients sign their books after they are dosed
- Provide chairs for clients to use while their dose is absorbed
- Converse with clients before they leave.

Pharmacotherapy Training for GP's

In an effort to improve general practitioner access to pharmacotherapy training, the Department of Human Services Victoria, together with the Royal College of General Practitioners, hold regular training days.

Courses for gp's seeking approval to prescribe pharmacotherapies for opioid dependence have been planned as follows:

Sunday 22 June, at DGP Geelong
Sunday 24th August, at Western Division of General Practice, Footscray.

Please phone Erica Lagogiannis at the RACGP on 8699 0484 for more information.

In addition, courses covering more general management of drug and alcohol issues are being planned for interested gp's, pharmacists and their ancillary staff in the Cranbourne/Mornington Peninsula areas. It is envisaged these courses will be held mid-2003.

Please phone Tamara Furey, DPU on 1300 364 545 or 0418 221 452 for details.

May 2003

Welcome to our regular newsletter for doctors, pharmacists and associated services supporting the pharmacotherapy program in this state. In this edition we have included information about buprenorphine and pregnancy, buprenorphine diversion and the community health centre initiative. Additionally we have also listed many of the pharmacies that were approved in 2002 to supply pharmacotherapies. We trust this information will be interesting and informative. If you have questions or comments please feel free to contact us on 1300 364 545. Your newsletter contact is Janet Morey on 9637 4070.

Keith Moyle

Manager, Drugs and Poisons Unit

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Equipment Required for dispensing

Pharmacotherapies

The Drugs and Poisons Unit is often asked for advice with regard to equipment required for dispensing pharmacotherapies.

The following list of suppliers is not exhaustive, nor does it represent DPU endorsement. Readers' feedback would be appreciated.

Dispensing Pumps

(For smaller programs dispensing methadone to five or so clients, using a syringe to measure out doses may be more cost effective than investing in a pump.)

Medos Co	ph:03 9562 6888
Interpath Services	ph:03 9457 6277
Trubor Glass Instrument	ph:03 9801 5159

Bottles/Jars for take-aways

Bottles or jars containing take-away doses of methadone should be fitted with child-resistant closures, be resistant to breakage and labelled with appropriate warnings. Take-away doses in Victoria must be diluted with fruit juice or cordial to 200ml.

McGloin's	ph:02 9894 4844
Cospak	ph:03 9587 5311
PB Packaging	ph:03 9580 2077
Plasdene Glass-Pak	ph:03 9480 3222

Disposable cups

Disposable cups are the most hygienic way to dispense supervised doses of methadone as well as crushed buprenorphine tablets. These are available from your wholesaler.

Tablet pulverisers/crushers

Tablet crushers are available from your wholesaler.

Methadone and buprenorphine

The Drugs and Poisons Unit notifies wholesalers when pharmacies are approved to dispense methadone and buprenorphine. The Commonwealth subsidises these drugs so that they are then supplied to pharmacies at no charge.

Methadone syrup	Mayne
Subutex	Mayne, Sigma, API
Biodone	API

Buprenorphine And Pregnancy

The safety of buprenorphine for opiate dependence during pregnancy and breastfeeding has not yet been definitively established. Methadone maintenance remains the treatment of choice for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

All women of childbearing age who commence buprenorphine treatment should be warned of the lack of proven safety of buprenorphine in these situations and advised on appropriate contraception.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration approved buprenorphine in October 2000 for the treatment of opiate dependence. Both pregnancy and breastfeeding have been listed as contra-indications. (Reckitt Benckiser 2001.) Any use of buprenorphine in either scenario is, therefore, 'off-label' use of the medication, placing a greater responsibility on the prescribing doctor to discuss the risks and benefits of the medication with the patient. Medical practitioners may choose to consult with their medical indemnity organisations regarding cover in these situations.

The majority of research regarding use of buprenorphine for pregnant women and during lactation has been done in Europe. This research is in a state of ongoing development. Data on the safety of buprenorphine during pregnancy and breastfeeding will evolve in the coming years.

For information regarding current DHS funded trials at the Royal Women's Hospital using buprenorphine contact Adrian Dunlop, Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre on 8413 8413.

Recruitment for a New Study

Transferring from methadone doses over 30mg to buprenorphine is often complicated by precipitated opiate withdrawal. For many people, reducing their methadone to less than 30mg is difficult to achieve without increasing their heroin use. For these people, transferring to buprenorphine at higher doses may be appropriate.

A DHS funded study is to be conducted by Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre to assist patients transferring to buprenorphine from methadone doses between 50-100mg. The study aims to determine the severity of opiate withdrawal associated with these "high dose transfers" using three different pharmacology approaches. The study will take place at DePaul house, Fitzroy and the Western Hospital Drug and Alcohol Service withdrawal unit, Footscray. In these residential detoxification facilities withdrawal symptoms can be monitored and adequate medication can be safely given to control precipitated withdrawal symptoms.

If you would like more information about this study, or if you have patients on methadone doses between 50 and 100mg who you believe may benefit from transfer to buprenorphine in this study, please contact Dr Nicolas Clark on 8413 8447.

Newly Approved Pharmacotherapy Pharmacies

The Drugs and Poisons Unit has been recruiting additional pharmacies to dispense pharmacotherapies. While it's difficult to provide complete lists (due to constant updates) we hope this list of newly approved pharmacotherapy pharmacies is helpful and we welcome these recent participants in the program.

Clients should contact Direct Line on 1800 888 236 to enquire about vacancies in their area.

Goonawarra Pharmacy	Sunbury
Wheeler's Pharmacy	Bayswater
Collett's Amcal Chemist	Portland
Gippsland Centre Pharmacy	Sale

St Albans Pcy C'mart Extra	St Albans
Reservoir East Pharmacy	Preston
Melissa's Pharmacist Advice	Clayton
Footscray Plaza Pharmacy	Footscray
Footscray Central Pharmacy	Footscray
Warrnambool Healthwise Pcy	
Weir's Pharmacy	Reservoir
Tucker Road Pharmacy	Bentleigh
Weir's Pharmacy	Bundoora
Nhill Pharmacy	Nhill
John Rocchi Pharmacy	Northcote
My Chemist Express	Reservoir
Pharmacy Shoppe	Fawkner
Callanan Pharmacy	Werribee
Altona gate Pharmacy	Altona Nrth
Waterfall Gully Pharmacy	Rosebud Sth
North Fawkner Pharmacy	Fawkner
The Medicine Shoppe	Braybrook
Mt Eliza Healthsense Pcy	Mount Eliza
Federation Pharmacy	Newborough
Viewbank Pharmacy	Viewbank
Halfpenny Pharmacy	Coburg
Richmond Pharmacy	Richmond
Picone's Pharmacy	Terang
Mallacoota Pharmacy	Mallacoota
My Chemist	Moonee Ponds
Yarram Pharmacy	Yarram
Montrose pharmacy	Montrose
Terry White Chemist	Frankston
John Grogan Pharmacy	Nunawading
Beacon Cove Pharmacy	Port Melb
Pharmacy on Collins	Melbourne
Montague's Pharmacy	Morwell
Kevin de Vries Pharmacy	Bendigo
Dendy Pharmacy	Brighton
Arnold Street Pharmacy	Bendigo
Clifford Pharmacy	Brighton
Arnold Street Pharmacy	Bendigo
Edwards & Beecroft Pcy	Wantirna
Doverton Pharmacy	Doveton
Daffy's Pharmacy	Footscray
Tony Rayward Pharmacy	Werribee

Storage of Methadone

All pharmacists are reminded that bottles of methadone not in current use must be locked in a secure cabinet or safe. If 1 litre bottles are too large to keep in the existing cabinet, methadone is available in smaller 250ml bottles. Otherwise the purchase of a larger safe should be considered.

Community Health Centre Initiative

Ideally clients seeking treatment for opiate dependence can be helped by their own general practitioner. It is however acknowledged that a significant proportion of these clients require multi-faceted assistance. In addition, many gp's feel they don't have a supportive enough infrastructure within their private practices to work effectively with this patient group. In 2002 the Department of Human Services, Victoria granted seed funding to several community health centres to develop or expand a pharmacotherapy program. Early progress reports from these programs have been encouraging. Many of the health centres are reporting significant numbers of clients starting pharmacotherapy for the first time, citing improved access to services as the main reason for commencing treatment. The prescribers also appreciate the clinical and administrative support available to them in community health centres settings.

If you are an approved prescriber of pharmacotherapies, please consider offering your services for 1-2 sessions per week at one of the centres listed below.

Eastern Access Community Health (Ringwood), Latrobe Community Health (Ringwood), La Trobe Community Health Service Inc (Moe, Morwell, Traralgon), Echuca Regional Health (Echuca), North Yarra Community Health Inc (Collingwood, Carlton, Fitzroy), Banyule Coommunity Health Service Inc. (West Heidelberg, Northcote), Plenty Valley Community Health Services Inc (Epping, Whittlesea), Frankston Community Health Service (Frankston), Southern Health (Cranbourne, Dandenong, Springvale), Western Region Health Centre Ltd (Braybrook), Quamby House (Portland). Please phone Janet Morey, Pharmacotherapy Program Co-ordinator on 9637 4070 if you would like contact details.

Pharmacotherapy Program Census

Pharmacotherapy approved pharmacies are contacted quarterly by the Drugs and Poisons Unit to ascertain the number of clients on their program on a given day. This produces an accurate snapshot of the program. The latest census shows a slight overall increase in numbers on the program, with buprenorphine client numbers continuing to increase and methadone numbers decreasing.

