Some Methadone Clinics Aren't Following Social Distancing Guidelines

Even after federal regulators relaxed rules requiring daily clinic visits, these bad actors are still bringing patients in for monitoring.

April 20, 2020 By Benjamin Ryan

A substantial minority of methadone clinics are flouting social distancing guidelines and needlessly bringing recipients of the medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder (OUD) into their facilities, STAT News reports. This after federal regulators, seeking to promote social distancing in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, relaxed rules that typically require daily clinic visits for people to receive methadone.

The new rules permit people with OUD who are considered "stable" to receive up to a 28-day supply of methadone and for those considered "less than stable" to receive up to a 14-day supply.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration have also permitted people with OUD to start on buprenorphine based on a phone call consultation, with no clinic visit required.

Zachary Talbott, president of the National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery (NAMA), has collected photos and videos sent by both patients and staff of methadone clinics in half a dozen states as a part of their complaints that the facilities are not following social distancing protocols.

Talbott submitted a letter to Mark Parrino, president of the American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence, detailing his complaints that methadone programs aren't doing all they can to help prevent transmission of coronavirus at clinics.

Clinics in eight states, Talbott states in his letter, are requiring recipients of take-home doses of methadone to nevertheless come into the clinic for "call-backs" and "medication counts." There are also clinics that still require in-person group counseling sessions and routine attendance, even for those with chronic health conditions that put them at risk for severe outcomes from coronavirus infection.

This letter of complaint follows on the heels of a recent sign-on letter circulated by NAMA, the Drug Policy Alliance and the Urban Survivors Union, that calls for even more advanced measures to revamp the rules governing the use of MAT to help reduce in-person contact.

To read the STAT News article, click here.

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