

THE WHAT, WHY, & MYTHS OF MAT



Rob Young, M.Ed., LICDC-CS
Clinical Services Director

What is Medication Assisted Treatment?

- MAT utilizes FDA-approved medications to treat substance dependence and addiction.
- Designed to be used in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies to provide a “whole-patient” approach to the treatment of Substance Use Disorders.



What is Medication Assisted Treatment?

- Research has shown that this approach to treating Opioid & Alcohol Use Disorders helps to:
 - Improve patient survival
 - Increase retention in treatment
 - Decrease illicit opiate use and other criminal activity among people with addiction
 - Increase patients' ability to gain and maintain employment
 - Improve birth outcomes among women who have SUD and are pregnant



What is Medication Assisted Treatment?

■ Types of medications

- **Agonists:** a drug that activates certain receptors in the brain. It mimics or is very similar to other substances that activate brain receptors. (i.e. Methadone)
- **Partial Agonist:** while it binds tightly to receptors in the brain, it does not have a “full agonist” effect like methadone. Because there is a ceiling effect to its action, patients using the medication do not develop a tolerance. (i.e. Buprenorphine, Chantix)
- **Antagonists:** a type of drug that blocks or dampens a brain receptor response. It is the opposite of activating it like an agonist. (i.e. Narcan, Vivitrol)



Why use MAT?

- When people become dependent on opioids, they feel sick when there are no opioids in the body. This sickness is known as withdrawal.
- Combining withdrawal and intense cravings to use can make recovery especially difficult.
- By helping to reduce cravings and withdrawal, MAT can help a person stop thinking constantly about needing to use. This allows the person to focus on returning to a healthy lifestyle.



Why use MAT?

- A person who takes these medications as directed under the care of a physician is just like a patient who takes medication to treat any other disease, like diabetes or heart disease.
- Last year the FDA in issued new scientific recommendations aimed at encouraging more widespread innovation and development of novel MAT drugs for the treatment of Opioid Use Disorders. This is part of the FDA's ongoing commitment to promote more widespread development, access to, and adoption of MAT.



How long will someone need to use MAT?

- People may safely take medications used in MAT for months, years, several years, or even a lifetime.
- An individual's plan is created with their doctor, and plans to stop medication should always be discussed before making changes to their prescriptions or treatment.



Does MAT just substitute one addiction for another?

- This is a common misconception of MAT- not accurate!
- Instead, these medications relieve the withdrawal symptoms and psychological cravings that cause chemical imbalances in the body. MAT programs provide a safe and controlled level of medication to overcome the use of an abused opioid.
- Research has shown that when provided at the proper dose, medications used in MAT have no adverse effects on a person's intelligence, mental capability, physical functioning, or employability.



Are you really in recovery if you use MAT?

- MAT can be controversial because some treatment programs and support groups define “success” as TOTAL abstinence from these medications as well as all drugs and alcohol.
- While this may be a realistic approach and a goal for some, many people need medication as part of a comprehensive recovery plan.
- It’s the same with diabetes. Some people can manage their disease using diet and exercise while others need medication to stay healthy.



Are you really in recovery if you use MAT?

- Per SAMHSA: “Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential”
- At the end of the day, “recovery” is a subjective term. It means something different for each and every person.



Are you really in recovery if you use MAT?

- **Bottom Line:** Look at the big picture of your loved one's life. You know them; you know when they are doing okay and when they're not.
 - Are they contributing to society in some way by attending school, volunteering or working?
 - Are they taking better care of themselves?
 - Are they attending support group meetings or getting some form of ongoing support or counseling?
 - If they are no longer misusing the substance that was getting them into trouble and threatening their health - and their life - then perhaps MAT is helping them function more normally again.



Additional Resources

- Townhall II (24/7 Helpline 330.678.HELP)
 - *Townhall2.com*
- Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County
 - *mental-health-recovery.org*
- American Society of Addiction Medicine
 - *asam.org*
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
 - *samhsa.gov*
- Ohio Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services
 - *mha.ohio.gov*

