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Common Questions and Concerns about Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT): A Handout for Family Members of a Person with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)

It is very common for family members of a person with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) to have questions and concerns about their loved one's treatment, recovery and future. Below are some common questions and concerns that family members have about Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). We hope you'll use this as a way to start the conversation.

Q: What is Medication Assisted Treatment?

A: Medication Assisted Treatment, commonly referred to as MAT, simply means using a medication to help treat a person's opioid use disorder. Sometimes it's helpful to use the analogy of another chronic disease like diabetes. Similar to using insulin to treat diabetes, MAT is medication used to treat OUD. There are 3 medications that are commonly used to treat OUD: Methadone, Buprenorphine (Suboxone), and Naltrexone/Vivitrol. Some of these medications are taken orally on a daily basis. Vivitrol is a monthly injection. Each of these medications works in slightly different ways and your family member's doctor will talk with your family member about which medication is most appropriate for their personal needs.

Q: It sounds like you'd just be replacing one drug with another. How is this any different than addiction?

A: This is a common concern and misconception about MAT. It's important to think about values when trying to understand how MAT is different from opioids used in active addiction. The goal of MAT is to help a person recover from OUD so that he/she can live their life according to their values. When a person has addiction, their drug use interferes with their values, whether those values are family, work, responsibility, or honesty, for example. Using MAT as one tool in recovery is a way to regain control of one's life and ultimately, get back in touch with what is important to them to live a full and meaningful life.

Q: How long will my family member be on this medication?

A: This is something that your family member and doctor will discuss. It is not uncommon for family members, and patients, to start thinking of "going off" of this medication before they've even started taking it. Let's take a step back and think about where this question might be coming from. Are there fears about becoming dependent on this medication? Is there worry about the safety of the medication or whether or not it will really work? The stigma that still exists around addiction may also be driving this question. Taking this medication is not without its risks, but when used correctly, the benefit of being able to live a life free of active addiction usually outweighs the risks for most people.



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Q: I'm really tired of dealing with this addiction. How do I know this time will be any different?

A: Many family members have a range of emotions when it comes to their loved one's addiction such as sadness, anger, hopelessness, and many others. Given all that you've seen them go through and all that you've been through with them, these are normal reactions. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that this time will be different. However, using MAT in conjunction with behavioral and psychosocial treatment has been shown to be an effective way to treat OUD. Coping with a loved one's addiction is difficult and can often feel isolating, like no one else will understand. It's important to find ways to support yourself.

Q: Where can I find support for myself?

A: This is a great question because it can be helpful to not only learn how to best support your family member, but importantly, how you can best take care of yourself as well. There are various self-help groups available including Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, and Families Anonymous. Each of these programs are free of charge and open to family members of a loved one with addiction. (You can find links to the websites of these programs at the bottom of this page.) Many treatment programs have a family component of treatment. Sometimes family members may also seek out counseling for themselves.

Use the space below to write down your own questions and concerns about MAT.

Resources for family members:

- Al-Anon: www.al-anon.org
- Nar-Anon: www.nar-anon.org
- Families Anonymous: www.familiesanonymous.org
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): www.samhsa.gov

Funding for this initiative was made possible (in part) by grant no. from SAMHSA. The views expressed in written conference materials or publications and by speakers and moderators do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.