Virtual Buprenorphine Clinic
Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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A Brief Overview

Opioids and Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)
Overview of Opioids

- Bind to opioid receptors in the brain that trigger the dopamine reward system
- Physiological dependence leads to severe withdrawal syndrome when use is stopped abruptly

**Systemic effects include:**
- pain relief
- feelings of euphoria
- decreased respiratory drive
- constipation

**Withdrawal symptoms include:**
- gastrointestinal upset
- Anxiety
- insomnia
- muscle cramps
- excessive sweating
Medications for Opioid Use Disorder

- MOUDs are the first line treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)

- MOUD refers to modalities such as Buprenorphine, Extended-release naltrexone, Buprenorphine extended release, and Methadone maintenance treatment

- Treatment for Overdose:
  - Naloxone (Narcan) is an opioid blocker, usually administered as an intranasal spray
Buprenorphine Overview

- A partial agonist opioid medication
- Most commonly taken as a buprenorphine/naloxone combination known as Suboxone
- Can be taken as a pill or sublingually as a film that dissolves under the tongue
- Historically can only be prescribed by physicians who have undergone training to receive a waiver, and requires frequent office visits and check ins
The Intersection of

OUD and COVID-19
Impact of COVID-19 on OUD

Decreased Access to Care:

- Widespread outpatient clinic closures
- In-person support groups and group therapy meetings suspended
- Individuals may struggle to have a phone and find a space to speak in private or engage in group/individual meetings (i.e. for those undomiciled, in shelters, etc)
Impact of COVID-19 on OUD

Vulnerable OUD Populations:

- Pre-pandemic rise in opioid use and overdose in the last decade, more recently driven by fentanyl
- OUD may worsen individual COVID-19 outcomes
- Social isolation, disruptions to harm reduction and addiction treatment services, and overwhelmed ERs unable to refer individuals to care increase risk of morbidity and mortality
Response to COVID-19 Guidelines

- In response to efforts from advocates, the Drug Enforcement Agency and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have broadened prescriber flexibility amidst the pandemic.

- “SAMHSA strongly recommends the use of telehealth and/or telephonic services to provide evaluation and treatment of patients. These resources can be used for initial evaluations including evaluations for consideration of the use of buprenorphine products to treat opioid use disorder.”
Timeline

- **March 12**: Temporary halt in new OBOT patients
- **March 17**: Virtual BPN clinic (VBC) planning meetings
- **March 20**: Governor stay at home order
- **March 25**: VBC operational
Who We Serve & What We Do

- We offer services to anyone in NYC seeking continuation or initiation of buprenorphine treatment for OUD.
- For people currently out of state, we will provide care for if they have been seen at an H+H facility within the past year.
- We work with individuals on MAT transitioning out of Rikers.
- We can take care of any patient regardless of insurance or ability to pay.
Who We Serve & What We Do

- We do not offer methadone or Vivitrol, however we prescribe **Narcan**

- We can refer patients for additional needs including but not limited to:
  - primary care physicians
  - mental health resources
  - assistance with housing and phone access
  - free legal aid
The Virtual Buprenorphine Clinic is comprised of:

- Full-time **waivered providers** (MDs and NPs) who can prescribe buprenorphine
- **Social worker** to assist in managing insurance coverage and direct patients towards additional resources as needed
- **Clinic Coordinator** to track patient appointments and ensure patient medical needs are adequately met
- **Student volunteers** involved with in-between and missed visit follow up phone calls to address emergent issues/improve retention
Workflow

- Patient Intake
- First Visit (Physician Encounter)
- Between Visit Follow Up Check-Ins
- Follow Up Visits
Results

- **Enrollment**: 1-3 new patients daily

- **Demographic characteristics**:  
  - Past month release from prison/jail: 22%
  - Not a mobile phone owner: 22%
  - Homeless: 20%

- **Clinical findings**:  
  - Active enrollment post-induction: 78%
  - Referred to Intensive Outpatient Programs: 21%
  - Referred to primary care: 12%
Going Forward

- This is a **temporary solution** and only meant to provide short term care with the goal to transition patients to long term maintenance therapy at one of our many clinics at H+H or in the community as per the individual’s preference.

- We hope this model can demonstrate efficacy in addressing OUD via a telehealth modality, with an eye towards expanding access and care to this population going forward!
Virtual Buprenorphine Clinic
Taking New Patients

NYC Health + Hospitals is operating a virtual buprenorphine (Suboxone) clinic in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The clinic serves all NYC residents seeking opioid addiction treatment for continuation or initiation of buprenorphine.

Clinic hours (by phone or video conference):
Mon - Fri, 9 AM - 4 PM

For appointments and referrals, call:
212-562-2665
Thank You!

-The Virtual Buprenorphine Clinic Team