

## Fact sheet

# Managing the ongoing care of patients on the NSW Opioid Treatment Program (OTP)

August 2024

Managing the care of patients with opioid dependence is supported by the NSW Opioid Treatment Program (OTP). Integrating this with general health care, supports responsive and person-centred health care which achieves better outcomes for patients.

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## Instructions

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### General instructions and tips

- It is recommended to see stable patients every **one to three months**.
- **At each visit:**
  - Call the patient's dosing point to discuss any emerging issues or feedback.
  - Ask the patient about any other drug use.
  - Discuss any other issues the patient may be facing such as housing, finances, family and relationships, work and general health.
  - Ask the patient about their dose, if they have been experiencing any side effects or withdrawal symptoms.
  - Be aware of any upcoming public holidays when the dosing point may be closed. Consider if alternative dosing points or takeaways may be required and refer to the [NSW Clinical Guidelines: Treatment of Opioid Dependence](#) for advice regarding takeaway doses.
  - Address any other general health needs of the patient or take the opportunity to administer any routine screening that may be relevant to the patient.
  - Send the prescription directly to the dosing point.
  - Book the next appointment just prior to the date their opioid pharmacotherapy prescription expires.
  - Consider arranging a three monthly drug screen if clinically appropriate.
- Determine if a **temporary transfer of dosing point or take away doses** may be needed. Check with the patient if they will be travelling soon – for holidays, work or sorry business for example. Let them know that you need advance notice to arrange a transfer of dosing point. Ask the patient if

they have found a pharmacy where they wish to travel to or Contact ADIS (1800 250 015) for a list of pharmacies who dose in the area. Visit the [NSW Health Website](#) for more information.

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## What to do if you are worried about a patient

There are a number of reasons why you might be concerned with continuing to manage a patient in the General Practice setting. These include multiple missed appointments or last minute cancellations, risky drug use, challenging behaviour towards you, your staff or other patients, missing doses or complex mental and /or physical health concerns.

For information and support you can contact:

- **Drug and Alcohol Specialist Advisory Service (DASAS)** This helpline for doctors runs 24 hours a day 7 days a week. They take a message and get an Addiction Specialist to call you back. Ph: 1800 023 687
  - **Your LHD Alcohol and Other Drug Service.** Before taking over the care of a stable patient it is recommended that you liaise with your local public clinic to make sure they are prepared to assist should your patient's circumstances change and a transfer of care is required.
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## What to do if you are going on holidays

To ensure continuity of care for your patients, it is recommended that you:

- Let your patients know how long you will be away for.
  - Make sure your patients have current prescriptions and the details of the GP covering your patient load throughout the period you're away. If this GP is not an experienced in prescribing to patients being managed under the NSW OTP arrange for an experienced prescriber to be available for support if needed.
  - NSW OTP prescribers are required to arrange an alternate prescriber when they are going on planned leave. This person will ideally be experienced in the management of drug dependent patients and if possible, they should be an accredited prescriber. Please inform the Ministry of Health about any change in arrangements by contacting the Pharmaceutical Services Unit on (02) 9424 5885.
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## What to do if your patient wants to complete treatment

Patients are understandably keen to complete their treatment. Acknowledge your patient's goals and support them to do this slowly. Manage their expectations by letting them know it can take a couple of years to fully complete treatment. Consider how their dose could be gradually reduced. Refer to the [NSW Clinical Guidelines: Treatment of Opioid Dependence](#) and seek clinical advice from your local public clinic if required.

Assess your patient's progress monthly to check that they're doing OK. If they're struggling with withdrawal symptoms, starting to use drugs again or struggling with thoughts of using drugs, encourage them to slow, stop decrease or even slightly increase their dose for a period of time.

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## Further information

- [NSW Clinical Guidelines: Treatment of Opioid Dependence](https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=GL2018_019)
- [Opioid Treatment Program \(OTP\) prescriber self audit tool](#)
- [NSW Opioid Treatment Program \(OTP\)](#)