

Fact sheet

Accepting transfer of patients being treated for opioid dependence

September 2024

Through provision of opioid dependence treatment alongside general health care, General Practitioners can contribute to dramatic health gains and improvements in their patients' lives.

Instructions

General instructions and tips

When approached to take over the care of patients prescribed medicines under the NSW Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) consider if your practice will meet the needs of the patient. Questions to ask the transferring prescriber include:

- Does the patient want to transition to a GP prescriber?
- Will the patient be able to get to appointments at my practice?
- Does the patient attend appointments consistently?
- Is the patient likely to be able to pay any out-of-pocket expenses that my practice charges?
- What other medications does the patient take?
- How long has the patient been prescribed their current medicines to treat opioid dependence?
- Has the patient expressed plans to complete or change their current treatment or dose?
- How does the patient respond if you are running behind and wait times are extended?
- Does the patient have other health or psycho-social care needs that I need to be aware of or require coordination and collaboration with other support services?
- How has the current public prescriber built trust with the patient and do they have any suggestions for how you can ensure the patient feels at ease during the transfer of their care.
- What education and support can the public clinic offer to support the transfer of the patient's care. For example, information sharing or being available for phone calls as needed.

If you determine transfer of the patient to your care is likely to be suitable, inform the transferring prescriber and arrange an appointment with the patient. Ensure reception staff contact the patient in advance to let them know what they can expect from the appointment, the cost and anything they need to bring with them (photo identification for example). Let them know that non-attendance at appointments may result in your practice not being able to take them on as a new patient.

During the appointment explore:

- The patient's current drug use including alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. Ask for specific information about quantities, how often they may use and by what route. (Don't forget benzodiazepines & prescribed opioids).
- Length of time in treatment, name and contact details of the clinic or pharmacy where are they receiving their dose.
- Other general medical history, including physical and mental health and medications.
- Urine drug screen. Ask how frequently they have completed screens and if recent results can be shared from their current prescriber.
- If the patient feels confident they will be able to attend appointments and are comfortable with you becoming their prescriber.

If you both determine the patient will be a good fit, complete the necessary documentation to accept the transfer of their care, including:

- The application for authority to prescribe on SafeScript. Approval to prescribe these medicines may be granted immediately.
- A Treatment Agreement Form.
- Take their photo and explain to the patient why this is required, where it will be kept and who will have access to it, or alternatively take a photocopy/photograph of their photo ID.
- Temporary Transfer Form which includes ID information.
- Apply for PBS Authority Approval if necessary.
- Prepare a letter to the dosing point to advise that you are the patient's new prescriber and provide information about your contact details.
- Arrange for an exit form to be completed by previous prescriber

You may want to consider splitting this initial discussion and completing documentation over two appointments.

If you determine the patient would be better supported in a specialist setting, contact their previous prescriber or public clinic in your local health district to advise and inform the patient.

If you have accepted a transfer of their care and later determine the patient would benefit from a transfer to a public clinic, contact the clinic to discuss.

Continuity of care for the patient should be prioritised. Give the patient time to prepare for a change in prescriber and explain your decision to them with respect and empathy.

For further information

For more information and guidance see the following resources:

- [RACGP Series: Prescribing Drugs of Dependence in General Practice](#)
- [NSW Opioid Treatment Program](#)
- Drug and Alcohol Specialist Advisory Service (DASAS) is a free 24/7 telephone service (Ph: 1800 023 687) that provides general advice to health professionals in need of assistance with clinical diagnosis and management of patients with alcohol and other drug related concerns.