The Impact of Prior Authorization on Buprenorphine Dose, Relapse and Cost of Opioid Addiction Treatment

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Keywords
Drug addiction treatment, Medicaid, buprenorphine, pharmaceutical policy, prior authorization, opioid treatment

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The Impact of Prior Authorization on Buprenorphine Dose, Relapse and Cost of Opioid Addiction Treatment

Evidence from Massachusetts’ Medicaid Program

Supported by National Institute of Drug Abuse grant number 5R01DA029741
The UMass Research Team

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- Bill Fisher, PhD

This presentation is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the views of the Massachusetts EOHHS or of NIDA. The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.
Buprenorphine/naloxone

- Introduced in 2003 (Suboxone®)
- First opioid for addiction treatment that can be dispensed in an outpatient setting and taken without direct observation
  - Considered safer than methadone
  - Doses > 24 mg not recommended
Why we are interested in Buprenorphine & Medicaid?

- Medicaid is a key payer for buprenorphine treatment
- Increasing concern about **cost** and **diversion** of buprenorphine
- Most states restrict access through prior authorization requirements
Buprenorphine treatment in MassHealth has risen steadily

MassHealth* Members with a Opioid Use Disorder Who were Treated with Buprenorphine

*BMassachusetts’ Medicaid program
Prior Authorization

• Prescribers must get authorization before a prescription is filled
• Seeks to reduce cost and/or improve safety
• Typically imposed by an insurer
• A favorite tool for Medicaid programs
Unanticipated Effects

- Does not always reduce costs
- May break treatment continuity
- May contribute to relapse

(Law et al, 2008; Abouzaid et al 2010; Lu et al. 2011; Morden 2008)
MassHealth* Prior Authorization for Suboxone®

- Implemented in January 2008
- High doses required more frequent authorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Dose</th>
<th>Authorization Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 32 mg</td>
<td>Each prescription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 24 mg &amp; ≤ 32</td>
<td>Every 90 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 16 mg &amp; ≤ 24</td>
<td>Every 180 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 16 mg</td>
<td>None required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Massachusetts Medicaid Program
Research Questions

1. Did high-dose treatment decrease?
2. Did prior authorization affect medication costs and total costs?
3. Did prior authorization affect relapse rates?
Methods

• Medicaid claims January 2007 through December of 2008
• Additional data on other publically funded detoxification treatment
• Limited to those who used Suboxone®
• Three treatment groups: Low dose < 16 mg/day, Medium 16-24 mg, High >24mg
Time series

• Population level analysis
  - analyzed claims for all patients using month as the unit of observation

• Individual level multivariable analysis
  - analyzed claims for continuously enrolled patients as the unit of observation (n =2,049)

• Generalized estimating equations for both
## Suboxone users in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low n = 908</th>
<th>Medium n = 699</th>
<th>High n = 442</th>
<th>Total n= 2,049</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>32.9 (9.9)</td>
<td>33.1 (9.4)</td>
<td>34.2 (9.7)</td>
<td>33.2 (9.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Women</strong></td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MH conditions</strong></td>
<td>1.4 (1.5)</td>
<td>1.3 (1.4)</td>
<td>1.2 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.3 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical conditions</strong></td>
<td>0.7 (1.0)</td>
<td>0.6 (0.9)</td>
<td>0.8 (1.0)</td>
<td>0.7 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suboxone® /$/month</strong></td>
<td>$164 ($96)</td>
<td>$284 ($128)</td>
<td>$362 ($179)</td>
<td>$248 (151)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total /$/month</strong></td>
<td>$1,372 ($1,640)</td>
<td>$1,110 ($1,025)</td>
<td>$1,102 ($1,185)</td>
<td>$1,224 ($1,367)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Standard deviation)
Suboxone® Doses Before and After Prior Authorization

![Graph showing the percentage of total users for different dose ranges over a year. The graph compares low dose (≤ 16mg), medium dose (>16 and ≤ 24mg), and high dose (> 24mg) before and after a prior authorization period.]
Cost impact

- Suboxone® expenditures decreased in the high dose group
- Increased in other groups
- Net 2008 Suboxone® savings from $131,347 to $492,641
- No savings in overall healthcare costs
Temporary Increase in Relapses
Limitations

• Measures limited to administrative data
• Cannot rule out secular (time) effects
Summary

• The PA effectively lowered high doses
• Modest decrease in Suboxone® cost
• No impact on total cost
• Temporary increase in relapses for medium & high dose groups
• Long-term impact of dose limits needs further study
Why should we care?

• At least 6 states now place lifetime limits on buprenorphine treatment
• Limiting access to medication-assisted treatment can result in more relapses, deaths and higher costs
• Dose related PAs may be a relatively safe way to manage “over prescribing”