Limiting the Duration of Medication Assisted Treatment for Opioid Addiction: Will New State Policies Help or Hurt?

Robin E. Clark  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Jeffrey D. Baxter  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Bruce A. Barton  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

*See next page for additional authors*

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Authors
Robin E. Clark, Jeffrey D. Baxter, Bruce A. Barton, Gideon Aweh, Elizabeth O’Connell, and William H. Fisher

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Limiting the Duration of Medication Assisted Treatment for Opioid Addiction: Will New State Policies Help or Hurt?

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The UMass Research Team

- Robin Clark, PhD
- Jeff Baxter, MD
- Bruce Barton, PhD
- Gideon Aweh, MS
- Elizabeth O’Connell, MS
- Bill Fisher, PhD

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Treatment for Opioid Dependence

• A variety of drug-free treatments, including professionally led and self-help

• Medication assisted treatment
  – Buprenorphine
  – Methadone
  – Naltrexone
Evidence strongly supports medication assisted treatment

• Effectiveness of drug free treatment varies widely
• Methadone is slightly more effective than buprenorphine
• Extended release naltrexone not available until late 2010
Concerns about medication assisted treatment (MAT)

- Diversion
- Methadone overdose
- Cost of long-term maintenance
- Public opinion (e.g. “substituting one opioid for another”)

Long-term methadone use is form of ‘State-sponsored social control’

Some addicts had been on the methadone treatment programme for 20 years

The Irish Times

The New York Times

The Double-Edged Drug
Addiction Treatment With a Dark Side
In Demand in Clinics and on the Street, ‘Bupe’ Can Be a Savior or a Menace
By DEBORAH SONTAG

NOVEMBER 16, 2013
These concerns shape treatment access for Medicaid beneficiaries

- Methadone maintenance is limited in many states
- Increasingly, Medicaid programs are limiting the lifetime duration of treatment (6 months to 3 years)
The state policy perspective

1. How many long-term MAT users are there?

2. What might the effects of restricted MAT treatment length be?

3. Are non-drug treatments for opioid addiction a viable alternative?

4. Can states save money by limiting the duration of treatment?
Sample

- 56,278 Medicaid members in MA treated for opioid addiction (2004 – 2010)
- 108,145 episodes of treatment lasting 3 months or more
- Allowing for a break of up to 60 days within an episode
Data

• Medicaid claims and enrollment 2003 - 2010
• Merged with other Public Health treatment data
• Relapse event = detoxification, emergency department visit, or hospitalization for substance abuse
Study design

• Compare buprenorphine, methadone and non-medication treatment episodes
• Outcome measures: episode length, relapses per month, Medicaid expenditures per month
• Adjust for demographics and clinical characteristics
• Members followed for up to 36 months
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Total (N = 56,278)</th>
<th>Buprenorphine (N = 18,866)</th>
<th>Methadone (N = 24,309)</th>
<th>Other (N = 31,220)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32,636 (58.0)</td>
<td>10,999 (58.3)</td>
<td>14,089 (58.0)</td>
<td>17,274 (55.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23,642 (42.0)</td>
<td>7,867 (41.7)</td>
<td>10,220 (42.0)</td>
<td>13,946 (44.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age, mean (SD)</td>
<td>33.8 (10.4)</td>
<td>32.1 (9.5)</td>
<td>32.7 (9.8)</td>
<td>34.5 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDPS, mean (SD)</td>
<td>3.2 (2.0)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.7)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.8)</td>
<td>3.4 (2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral health diagnosis, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMI</td>
<td>13627 (24.2)</td>
<td>3,878 (20.6)</td>
<td>3,877 (16.0)</td>
<td>10,311 (33.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13,647 (24.3)</td>
<td>5,080 (26.9)</td>
<td>5,397 (22.2)</td>
<td>7,660 (24.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major depression</td>
<td>8,113 (14.5)</td>
<td>2,564 (13.6)</td>
<td>2,982 (12.3)</td>
<td>5,397 (17.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-occurring substance use, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>12,861 (22.9)</td>
<td>3,338 (17.7)</td>
<td>3,030 (12.5)</td>
<td>10,019 (32.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drug</td>
<td>19,266 (34.2)</td>
<td>7,783 (41.3)</td>
<td>7,111 (29.3)</td>
<td>11,157 (35.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment episodes per person, mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.9 (1.2)</td>
<td>1.3 (0.7)</td>
<td>1.3 (0.7)</td>
<td>1.5 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid expenditures, mean (SD)</td>
<td>$1,086 (2224)</td>
<td>$867 (1802)</td>
<td>$1,002 (1855)</td>
<td>$1,485 (3074)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse during treatment, n (%)</td>
<td>19,578 (34.8)</td>
<td>3,901 (20.7)</td>
<td>4,786 (19.7)</td>
<td>13,578 (43.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Length of Episodes: Methadone, Buprenorphine & Other Treatment

- Methadone: 49,882 episodes
- Buprenorphine: 32,820 episodes
- Other: 25,443 episodes

Graph showing the number of episodes over the months of treatment.
## Percentage in treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment length</th>
<th>Buprenorphine</th>
<th>Methadone</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month 1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 6</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 12</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 24</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month 36</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statistical comparisons

- Cox proportional hazards for time to 1st relapse
- GEE for expenditures
- Adjusted for age, gender, mental health diagnoses, other substance abuse, disease burden, relapses prior to the current episode, prior costs
Relapse Rates: Methadone, Buprenorphine & Other Treatment

![Chart showing relapse rates for Methadone, Buprenorphine, and Other treatments over 36 months.](chart.png)
## Factors contributing to relapse

Cox proportional hazards survival model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Hazard rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drug abuse</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapses 6 months before treatment</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe mental illness</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buprenorphine treatment</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methadone treatment</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full model includes: age, gender, disease burden, relapses 6 mos. before tx., severe mental illness, major depression, other mental illness, alcohol abuse, other drug abuse, treatment type.
Average Monthly Medicaid Expenditures
# Adjusted Monthly Costs — selected factors

Generalized Estimating Equations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Regression coefficient (CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse</td>
<td>$396 (360, 430)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe mental illness</td>
<td>$249 (220, 277)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other drug abuse</td>
<td>$106 (86, 125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disease burden (per CDPS point)</td>
<td>$146 (135, 158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buprenorphine treatment</td>
<td>- $386 (-409, -363)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methadone treatment</td>
<td>- $146 (-170, -123)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Full GEE model includes: age, gender, disease burden, cost before tx, severe mental illness, major depression, other mental illness, alcohol abuse, other drug abuse, treatment type. Clustered by year of treatment start.

2 Chronic Illness and Disability Payment System. Kronick et al 2000
Limitations

• Relied on administrative data
• Non-randomized study. Cannot control for unobserved differences in individuals using different treatments.
• Other important outcomes were not included—abstinence, arrest, incarceration, death
Conclusions

• Most treatment episodes last less than 2 years
• Relapse rates are lower for MAT
• Medicaid costs are lower for MAT
• Relapses and costs decrease with longer treatment
Policy implications

• 6 month treatment limits would affect most MAT users
• Limiting MAT is likely to increase relapse rates and costs
• Current non-drug treatment does not appear to be a dependable alternative to MAT