



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist
Governor

George H. Sheldon
Secretary

DATE: September 21, 2009

TO: Regional Directors

THROUGH: Pete Digre, Assistant Secretary for Operations
David L. Fairbanks, Assistant Secretary for Programs

FROM: Alan Abramowitz, State Director, Office of Family Safety

SUBJECT: Medication - Assisted Substance Abuse Treatment

PURPOSE: This memorandum provides information on the use of medication-assisted substance abuse therapies (such as Methadone and Suboxone) for parents of youth served by the child welfare system.

BACKGROUND: Recently it came to the attention of the Family Safety Program Office that, in some areas of the state, Department and lead agency child welfare staff may not have the information that they need concerning the use of medication-assisted therapies (such as Methadone and Suboxone) for parents of youth in contact with the child welfare system. Reportedly, short-term detoxification for addicted individuals has been emphasized instead of practices that are more evidenced based. In the case of parents with substance abuse and mental health issues it is important that child welfare staff work closely with the medical professionals to help determine the services that would be most beneficial to the individuals and families affected by the behavioral health disorder.

DISCUSSION: The medications used in medication-assisted treatment are prescribed and administered under the supervision of medical professionals and have been proven effective in curbing the craving of the addiction and in stabilizing addicted individuals. The use of long term, medication-assisted substance abuse treatment has been demonstrated to provide the best chance for long term stabilization for addicted individuals. If a medical professional directs an individual's involvement in a medication-assisted treatment program such as a methadone clinic, it indicates more extensive substance abuse treatment needs than can typically be addressed through short-term detoxification. Again, this is a medical decision.

The Department's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Office is the State Methadone Authority and has responsibility to provide oversight of the medication-assisted treatment program. Methadone programs are licensed by the Department, and accredited by either the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) or the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Methadone has been

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used for more than four decades as a successful, evidence-based treatment practice. Suboxone and Subutex (buprenorphine) are regulated by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). Physicians have to complete a series of trainings and are then certified by CSAT to use buprenorphine in the treatment of addiction to opiates.

Community Based Care lead agencies and their providers should support the decisions of the professionals who have training and certification in delivering quality substance abuse services, and consult the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program Office with any questions about the use of medication-assisted substance abuse treatment for the parents of children involved in the child welfare system.

ACTION REQUIRED: Please share this information with circuit administrators, CBC lead agencies, supervisors, and all other appropriate staff. Additional detail will be available soon, in the form of in-service training to provide more guidance on this important subject.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this issue please contact Frank Platt in the Office of Family Safety. Mr. Platt can be reached at frank_platt@dcf.state.fl.us, or at 850-922-2860.

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