

Perceptions of Methadone Maintained Clients about Barriers and Facilitators to Help-Seeking Behavior

Adeline Nyamathi, ANP, PhD¹, Donna McNeese Smith, RN, EdD¹, Steven Shoptaw, PhD², Malaika Mutere, PhD¹, Allan Cohen, MA, MFT³, Israel Amrani, MFT³, Louis Morales, JD³, Viviane de Castro, PhD^{1,4}

(1) University of California, Los Angeles, School of Nursing; (2) University of California, Los Angeles, Family Medicine; (3) Bay Area Addiction, Research and Treatment, Inc.; (4) University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Science

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

- To obtain perspectives of methadone clients ($n = 41$) who were also heavy drinkers on the barriers and facilitators to seeking medical assistance to improve their own health.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- There are over 3 million Americans aged 12 or older who are dependent on or abuse both illicit drugs and alcohol. Fewer than 25% of these users enter drug or alcohol treatment, however.
- Little research exists that describes the barriers and facilitators to seeking medical assistance among this population of drug and alcohol users.

WHAT ARE THE FINDINGS?

- Clients felt stigmatized and “looked down upon” by medical providers and, as a result, often chose not to tell providers they were on methadone maintenance.
- Clients expressed an interest in having alcohol treatment offered within methadone clinics.
- Nonjudgmental, empathetic care that fosters respect and facilitates help-seeking behavior were viewed as important, yet often lacking, characteristics of medical clinic staff

WHO SHOULD CARE MOST?

- Methadone maintenance programs.
- Substance abuse providers, physicians, and nurse-practitioners serving methadone-addicted clients.
- Individuals responsible for training nursing, medical, and allied health professionals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Include alcohol addiction treatment in methadone maintenance programs, or have methadone maintenance programs more formally partner with external substance abuse treatment programs.
- Provide education for health care and social service providers on alcohol and drug abuse, especially methadone, and create standards to increase provider expertise.
- Provide funding for research to compare the treatment and outcomes, including patient/client satisfaction, of those treated in methadone settings versus treatment in private physicians' offices.

Nyamathi A, Smith DM, Shoptaw S, et al. Perceptions of Methadone Maintained Clients about Barriers and Facilitators to Help-Seeking Behavior. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*. 2007; 4:301-309. The Community Policy Brief is intended to inform community based organizations, public health policy makers, and other individuals whose primary interest is not research, but who would be interested in the application and translation of research findings for practical purposes.