

Montefiore Buprenorphine Treatment Network COVID-19 Response Memo 3.23.20

General Guidance for Buprenorphine Treatment

- Because of changing policies occurring at Montefiore around COVID-19, in consultation with Montefiore Medical Group (MMG) leadership and in compliance with federal regulations, we will provide **ONLY telemedicine visits** for buprenorphine treatment (for new and established patients). No in-person visits will be conducted at our sites until further notice.
- **We will continue to evaluate new patients seeking buprenorphine treatment. Please direct ALL new patient referrals to bupe@montefiore.org or 718-405-8227.** Our staff are informed about which clinics are accepting new patients and will handle screening and scheduling telephonic visits for buprenorphine treatment.
- Patients receiving buprenorphine treatment at MMG clinics should be prescribed at least **one month's worth of buprenorphine medication** at each telemedicine visit (refills can be provided depending on clinical judgement). Providers should use their clinical judgment about how frequently follow-up telephonic visits should occur. In general, telemedicine visits for stable patients should occur less frequently than typically.
- **Urine drug testing should not be required to receive a buprenorphine prescription until we return to in-person visits.** Providers should use their clinical judgement to refer patients for urine drug testing and other laboratory tests when benefits of testing greatly outweigh the risks of COVID-19 exposure. Currently, urine and blood tests are offered at only a few MMG sites and require appointments.

Harm Reduction Considerations

- On-site naloxone training and distribution at MMG clinics will be paused. Naloxone kits should be prescribed to pharmacies that are registered to dispense naloxone under a standing order. Naloxone training will be provided telephonically. **Please direct any questions about naloxone training and prescribing to naloxone@montefiore.org.**
- The MMG satellite clinic at New York Harm Reduction Educators is temporarily closed. Syringe exchange services and naloxone distribution will continue to operate on mobile vans.
- For patients with co-morbid **alcohol use disorder**, we strongly recommend initiating medication treatment (i.e. acamprosate, topiramate) and counseling on harm reduction (i.e. access to alcohol stores) to prevent patients from life-threatening alcohol withdrawal during COVID-19.

Buprenorphine Treatment Services Offered During COVID-19

- Treatment coordinators will:
 - conduct telephonic visits for new patient intakes and established patient follow-up
 - assess for buprenorphine and naloxone refill needs, including checking iSTOP
 - inform patients that 30-day buprenorphine prescriptions are being sent, confirm pharmacy of choice, and queue up e-rx for waived PCP to sign
 - counsel patients on safe storage of medication to minimize loss or theft

- collect information on urgent medical and/or mental health needs
- case conference with PCP if patient has urgent medical and/or mental health needs
- **If the PCP is not available (i.e. on service in ED or hospital), treatment coordinators will enlist the Buprenorphine Treatment Physician Assistant to assist the patient and cc documentation to PCP.**

- Physician assistant will:
 - conduct telemedicine visits for new patients
 - conduct telemedicine visits for established patients who are unstable in buprenorphine treatment
 - conduct telemedicine visits for established patients with urgent medical and/or mental health needs
 - **provide prescribing coverage when PCP is not available (i.e. on service in ED or hospital, or by request)**

- Community health workers will:
 - provide telephonic naloxone training and locate pharmacies providing naloxone under non-patient specific prescription standing order
 - link patients with syringe exchange services
 - conduct telephonic visits to assist with concrete services, including medical insurance, housing, employment, transportation, and food pantries
 - assist providers with online submission of 2015 Forms for Medicaid transportation

- As policies continue to change, we will continue to keep everyone updated. Please let us know if you have any questions; email: Chinazo Cunningham, Tiffany Lu, or bupe@montefiore.org.

Thank you all for providing excellent care to our patients with opioid use disorder.