

# NEED TO KNOW

## Medication reduces overdose risk

*Buprenorphine and methadone can help patients at risk for fatal overdose*

BY JULIE MILLER

A National Institutes of Health (NIH) study found that treatment of opioid use disorder with either methadone or buprenorphine following a nonfatal opioid overdose is associated with significant reductions in opioid-related mortality. The research, presented in June in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, is the first study to look at the association between medication assisted treatment and mortality among overdose patients.

1

Study authors analyzed data from 17,568 adults in Massachusetts who survived an opioid overdose between 2012 and 2014. Compared to those not receiving medication assisted treatment,

**opioid overdose deaths decreased by 59%** for those receiving methadone and 38% for those receiving buprenorphine in one year's time. The authors were unable to analyze naltrexone in the same study.

2

Despite clinical evidence that medication assisted treatment can help many people recover from opioid addiction, the modality remains greatly underutilized. **Less than one third of patients were**

**provided any medication.** In the one-year study period, only 11% received methadone, 17% received buprenorphine and 6% received naltrexone. Authors note 5% received more than one medication.

3

The median use of **methadone** was five months, **buprenorphine** was four months, and **naltrexone** was one month.

4

Authors were concerned that 34% of people who experienced an overdose were **subsequently prescribed one or more prescriptions for opioid painkillers** over the next 12 months, and 26% were prescribed benzodiazepines.

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In an editorial commenting on the study, Nora Volkow, MD, and Eric Wargo, PhD, of the **National Institute on Drug Abuse**, called for changing policies to make the medications that treat opioid use disorder more accessible. They called for educating primary care and emergency providers on the fact that opioid addiction is a medical illness

that must be treated aggressively with the tools that are available.

Source: National Institutes of Health, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, <http://annals.org/aim/article-abstract/2684924/medication-opioid-use-disorder-after-nonfatal-opioid-overdose-association-mortality>