



Helping *Your Loved One* in MMT

***D*rug addiction** cannot be “cured,” but it can be treated so life can go on more normally. However, recovery from drug addiction is a lifelong journey.

If you have a loved one – family member, companion, or close friend – in a methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) program, this brochure offers some suggestions on how you can participate in that journey and offer help.

What is drug addiction?

People start using drugs with addictive potential for various reasons. However, at some point, many become dependent on those drugs both physically and mentally. They are addicted. Cravings and compulsions to use the drugs become daily obsessions.

Drug addiction is recognized by the American Medical Association and other authorities as a medical disease that upsets normal brain function. Some have compared opioid addiction with other illness, such as diabetes. It doesn't go away on its own and only gets worse without proper treatment. Methadone for an opioid-addicted person is much like insulin for a diabetic.

How does methadone work?

Methadone is a painkilling medicine discovered in the 1940s as a substitute for morphine. Drugs like morphine are known as opioids, acting in the brain on pain, mood, and other emotions. Heroin, Demerol®, OxyContin®, and Vicodin® also are opioids and they all can be addictive.

Methadone itself is an opioid, but it has special qualities that make it very useful as a *medication* for treating opioid addiction. In the 1960s, it was found that if taken every day – called a “maintenance dose” – as part of a recovery program offering supportive services, methadone helps restore more natural brain function.

At a proper oral dose, methadone does not make the person feel “drugged” or “high” like other opioids. Each dose lasts for 24 hours and takes away drug cravings.

Many people say that methadone actually makes them feel “normal” for the first time in a long while. A person in an MMT program can work or go to school and generally live a better, healthier life.

How long does MMT take?

There is no specific length of time in MMT that is best for everyone. The longer the person stays in methadone treatment, the greater the chances for successful recovery.

Many persons take methadone for a lifetime, and gladly so. After awhile, some people in MMT decide to try a completely drug-free approach without methadone, but this should always be discussed first with clinic staff.

How can you help?

The most important support you can offer is *encouragement*.

Recovery can be difficult and upsetting both emotionally and physically, especially during the early days. Let your loved one know that you are proud of him or her, that you notice a change for the better, and that you want to help.

There are many MMT clinic rules for your loved one to follow, such as attending the clinic to receive methadone and to participate in therapy. Understand that these commitments may have to come before other obligations.

Methadone is not a cure for addiction and it is only a treatment for addiction to opioids. Avoid bringing drugs or alcohol into the home. Your loved one also may need to avoid people and places once associated with drug taking.

If your loved one has take-home doses of methadone, help make certain the correct dose is taken each day exactly as prescribed. This can be done in a caring way, just as you would do with any other life-giving medicine, such as a heart medication.

*W*hat else can you do?

Reading this pamphlet was a good start toward helping your loved one in MMT. Here are some other things you can do:

- **Learn more about addiction and MMT. Introduce yourself to clinic staff and ask them for pamphlets, fact sheets, and other information.**
- **Participate with your loved one in clinic events and become involved in support groups that include families and friends of persons in treatment.**
- **If you are having conflicts with your loved one in MMT, seek professional help before the situation gets out of control.**
- **If your loved one has a drug relapse, be understanding but firm about the need to get back on course with the MMT program. If you need help, talk to the clinic staff.**
- **Remember, your own needs also are important. You must take care of yourself and those you are responsible for, such as young children, before you can help your loved one in MMT.**

Methadone has been used for more than 35 years, helping millions of persons in recovery from opioid addiction. Indirectly, it also has helped people like you with a loved one in MMT. You are not alone.

For further information on addiction and recovery issues, visit the *Addiction Treatment Forum* website at www.atforum.com.

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