

Buprenorphine Treatment Lags for Younger Patients with Opioid Use Disorder

On January 21 2020, a study published by JAMA highlighted the use of buprenorphine treatment for opioid use disorder in several age groups. Overall, use of buprenorphine has increased in most age groups, but there was a decrease in use among younger individuals. The study examined buprenorphine prescriptions filled from 2009-2018 by patients aged 15-80 at both retail and nonretail pharmacies. Annual rates increased from 1.97 per 1000 people in 2009 to 4.43 per 1000 people in 2018. However, use decreased around 20% to 1.40 (from 1.76) per 1000 people in patients aged 15-24 years old. Individuals in this group also received relatively low doses and had low rates of treatment retention. The results of this study highlight the importance of improving buprenorphine treatment services, especially for young patients with opioid use disorder.

Opioid-use disorder affects persons of all ages within the United States. It was declared a nationwide Public Health Emergency on October 27, 2017. Deaths from overdose have doubled over the last decade, with 72,000 Americans dying in 2017. In 2018, statistics stated 2 million Americans had an opioid use disorder, and 10.3 million people had misused prescription opioids at some point. Buprenorphine (brand Subutex) is one of three currently FDA-approved medication used to treat opioid addiction. It is administered daily as a sublingual tablet and is currently the preferred agent for induction of treatment. It works as a partial agonist at the mu-opioid receptor and an antagonist at the kappa-opioid receptor. Once treatment has begun, Suboxone is the preferred maintenance option due to the abuse potential of buprenorphine. In conclusion, opioid use disorder is a serious disease that should be treated with buprenorphine (or other addiction treatment medications), in addition to behavioral interventions and other recovery support services.

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