Addressing the Opioid Crisis in Vermont: Lessons Learned from Primary Care Physicians

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Background

Opioid Misuse in Vermont:
- The number of Vermonters seeking treatment for opioid abuse is increasing, particularly in Chittenden County.
- Emergency department visits and deaths related to opioid misuse continue to increase, both locally and nationally.

Opioid Addiction Treatment:
- The Drug Addiction Treatment Act (2000) was passed to allow physicians to prescribe buprenorphine-naloxone for opioid addiction, termed Office-Based Opioid Therapy (OBOT).
- OBOT has been shown to be a highly effective treatment for opioid addiction.
- The Hub and Spoke model was implemented in Vermont to connect specialty treatment centers with outpatient OBOT providers.

Project Goal: To identify barriers to providing OBOT that primary care physicians (PCPs) face in Chittenden County, Vermont.

Methods

- Performed structured interviews with 25 PCPs in Chittenden County regarding experiences and attitudes towards OBOT.
- Particular emphasis was placed on barriers to expanding OBOT capacity.
- Results were analyzed using the Grounded Theory approach.

Results

Table 1. Characteristics of PCPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Median/Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in Practice</td>
<td>16.5 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 1-38 yrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private practice</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing OBOT services</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBOT panel size</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 1-112</td>
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</tbody>
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Barriers to Providing OBOT

1. Insufficient state logistical support
2. Challenging patient population
3. Infrastructure/Capacity of the practice
4. Available time
5. Provider fears/concerns

Top 5 Barriers to Providing OBOT:

- Insufficient state logistical support
- Challenging patient population
- Infrastructure/Capacity of the practice
- Available time
- Provider fears/concerns

Ways To Improve the Hub and Spoke Model

- Increased support
- No change
- Hub needs to stabilize more patients
- Training is currently inadequate
- Don’t Know
- Transparency about patient outcomes

Discussion

- There were discrepancies in barriers noted between the Non-OBOT and OBOT providers.
  - Non-OBOT providers were more likely to report that OBOT patients were challenging than were OBOT providers.
  - OBOT providers were more likely to acknowledge the stigma associated with OBOT.
- Both groups desired increased state support for OBOT.
- A large proportion of Non-OBOT providers are willing to begin seeing OBOT patients if the identified barriers are addressed.

Recommendations

1. Increase state support/resources for OBOT
   - Hub and Spoke
   - Case management and counseling

2. Peer mentorship for newly waived OBOT providers by experienced OBOT providers
   - Remedy perception vs. reality
   - Address fears and concerns
   - Ensure success

3. Best practices guidelines
   - Physician education
   - Organization/coordination of office, staff, and physicians within a practice