

Fact Sheet : Methadone Maintenance Services

What is methadone?

A synthetic narcotic that suppresses opiate withdrawal for 24 hours with a single dose. Also known as dolophine and methaDose.

How was methadone discovered?

WWII Germans synthesized methadone to keep soldiers focused and alert. Dr. Vincent Dole of a New York university first used it as a blocker to all drugs, then realized it only worked to block the effects of opiates.

What are the effects of methadone?

It blocks the ability to feel “high” if a person uses opiates (heroin, OxyContin, morphine, etc.) It also decreases drug cravings, thus reducing drug seeking behaviors. There are very minimal side effects with a stable dosage. It produces no “high” when at a therapeutic dosage.

How and when is it taken?

Every 24 hours a liquid dose is taken. The dosage starts low, usually 15 mg., and gradually increases until stable. Once stabilized, the intent is to decrease *slowly* (to decrease the withdrawal effects as much as possible), usually 5 or 10 mg. a month. An average dose is around 60 to 85 mg.

What are the benefits of MMtx?

It is the only opiate tx in which a high % of individuals with substance dependency voluntarily enter and remain involved in tx. Two times monthly counseling sessions (total of 1.5 hours) with a certified counselor is the minimum. It is physician monitored, and the dose is given by a full staff of nurses. Methadone is a *maintenance* agent to assist with the physical effects of opiate addiction. Random drug testing is also done. All perspective clients are screened for emergency care needs and eligibility requirements. Each client is then assessed to determine appropriateness for the program. Each clinic is regulated by the Department of Health licensing board.

What are the dangers of MMtx?

Overdose is possible when using opiates while in methadone tx. Use of other drugs, especially cocaine and alcohol, is also a risk. Some people have no intent of decreasing their dose to titrate off of methadone completely, using methadone as a “security blanket.” Another risk is a person being on too high of a dose and the resulting effects mimicking intoxication or being under the influence.

What are some common issues surrounding MMtx?

Some people believe it is substituting one drug for another. Clinics are often depicted as only wanting to gain money from the clients. Many people believe that methadone tx causes the clients to engage in more criminal activity to support the often expensive daily medication. Others falsely believe that long-term use of methadone causes tooth decay and bone brittleness.

So what does this mean for Butler County?

Butler County's excellent highway access and midpoint location between New York, Philadelphia and Chicago gives access to drug traffickers. Those seeking tx for opiate addiction increased by 386% in Butler County from Jan 2000 through June 2004, from almost 40 individuals to over 130. Butler County's extremely high rate of heroin use proves the need for addressing opiate addiction, as well as prevention of all drug dependencies. MMtx is an alternative option for those seeking recovery through a continuum of care.