

## **Information for family/whanau of people on opiate substitution (methadone maintenance) treatment:**

Many people don't understand opiate substitution treatment (Methadone maintenance and Buprenorphine treatment). You might have heard some things about it and wonder if they are true. Some people think being drug-free is the only way to recover from opiate addiction. "*Why would someone chose opiate substitution treatment rather than being drug free?*" You might be wondering.

Some people who are addicted to opiates can stop taking them and become drug free. However this is rare as it is a very difficult thing to do for almost everyone with an addiction. Unfortunately most people, who are addicted to opiates and try to stop, don't succeed. Opiates are particularly harmful because they are injected, people usually become addicted to them quite fast and the withdrawals are so severe that people's lives quickly revolve around getting and taking the drug. This means, physical and mental health, family/whanau, work and other areas of life are severely affected by the addiction.

Usually by the time someone chooses opiate substitution (methadone maintenance) treatment, they have tried to stop taking opiates a number of times without success.

Methadone and Buprenorphine used in opiate substitution treatment are man- made opiates. They are long acting drugs remaining active for up to 72 hours after they are taken. They do not produce a "high" because they are taken up gradually in the brain. As long as the person takes their medication as prescribed, (usually once every day) they also won't go in to opiate withdrawal. This means that people on methadone treatment don't swing between intoxication and withdrawal. They feel better, are able to work, take on family responsibilities and stop the criminal and dangerous activities that they used to support their addiction. Their mind is not clouded, as long as they take the medication as prescribed and don't use other opiates, other drugs or alcohol. Because methadone is taken orally rather than injected, the risk of blood born diseases like Hepatitis and HIV is greatly reduced. Opiate substitution treatment enables the person to return to an active full life.

As with many other chronic health problems, addiction is a chronic relapsing condition. Once a person has an addiction they are vulnerable to future relapses. Because of this, opiate substitution treatment is often a long term therapy. People usually stay on Methadone for 2-5 years and sometimes for longer.

If your family/whanau member chooses to come off methadone maintenance treatment and have a drug free lifestyle, we will support them. But we don't pressure people to come off opiate substitution treatment. Relapse rates for people with an opiate addiction are very high (in the order of 80%) and relapse can cause such distress and even death, that every person with an addiction needs to make the decision that is best for them.

Family/whanau support is essential for a person's recovery, whether they stay in maintenance treatment or choose to come off and become drug free.

It is very important that family/whanau and friends don't pressure a person on opiate substitution treatment to come off. If a person comes off treatment too early and because of pressure from others, they are much more likely to return to their previous drug use. Such pressure may also make your family/whanau member feel that they are a failure, rather than enjoying the success they are achieving in rebuilding their lives.

You are the most important person in your family/whanau member's treatment team, which also includes our service. Please come and talk to us any time. The more you are involved the more likely your family member is to succeed.