What Medications Are Used For Opioid Overdose, Withdrawal, & Addiction?

By The Professionals At Robert Alexander Center

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- Restlessness and irritability

Someone who is addicted to opioids will experience severe side effects and will find it difficult to experience pleasure without the high provided by opioids. This can lead to risky behaviors and a tendency to put drugs above everything else, including their health and personal life.

Another danger of opioid use is overdose. As a patient's tolerance increases, they will need a higher dose of opioids to get the desired effect. This can increase the risk of an overdose, especially if the dosages aren't measured by a doctor. Someone can also overdose if they take a larger dose than they realize. Opioid overdoses slow or stop breathing, which can be fatal.

How the Medications for Opioid Overdose, Withdrawal, And Addiction Work

Recovering from opioid addiction isn't easy, and some cases necessitate medication. Certain medications can treat opioid overdose, withdrawal, and addiction. Medications reduce opioid use and cravings, this is sometimes known as detoxification. They each work in different ways:

- Naloxone is an emergency treatment that can stop an overdose in its tracks. If it's administered quickly enough, it can save the patient from permanent effects. Naloxone blocks the activity of opioid receptors in the brain, nullifying the effects of opioids.
- Lofexidine can alleviate withdrawal symptoms by activating adrenergic receptors in the brain. This makes it easier for patients to go without opioids as they recover.
- Methadone attaches to opioid receptors and blocks withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Naltrexone is an opioid receptor antagonist, much like naloxone. It negates the effects of opioids, so a patient is less likely to use them.
- Buprenorphine, or Subutex, attaches to opioid receptors in the brain and partially activates them, which eases withdrawal symptoms and cravings without having the full effect of an opioid. Naloxone and Subutex are sometimes used in tandem.

The recommended course of medication changes from patient to patient, so one program won't suit everyone. Typically, medication is most effective when it's used in tandem with other forms of treatment.

Other Treatments for Opioid Addiction

As well as treating the addiction physically, it's important to treat the mental and emotional aspects of the disease. Depending on the severity of the case, this can involve either inpatient care or intensive outpatient care. As stated before, programs differ from person to person.

Both of these treatment courses involve monitoring drug use, medication management, addiction education, group counseling, and individual therapy. With inpatient care, the patient will live in a facility after detoxification. There, they can be closely monitored by professionals.

Once the patient is further along with their rehabilitation, they can receive outpatient care. Intensive outpatient care allows you to ease your way back into your normal routine, while still being heavily supported as you continue to recover. These programs are also ideal for people who have a solid support system at home and less severe addictions.

The next step is the outpatient program. People with milder addictions and less severe withdrawal symptoms can also benefit from this program. You also need to be motivated enough, as attending therapy is vitally important for your treatment. As with the other programs, it will likely include medically-assisted treatment, group counseling, therapy, and relapse prevention.

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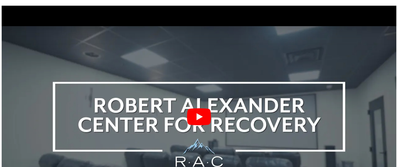
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