

Buprenorphine therapy for chronic pain management

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Introduction: Every day in the United States of America over a hundred people die from drug overdoses, mainly caused by opioids. The rates of overdose deaths from opioids have only been increasing and are estimated to have already caused approximately 500,000 deaths since 1999. Several attempts have been made to fight the ongoing opioid epidemic including educating the public, providing state and federal resources, supporting providers with laws and tools to improve prescribing guidelines, along with many other solutions. Buprenorphine has much potential to halt the ongoing opioid epidemic and offers people an alternative pathway to sobriety by blocking withdrawal symptoms, stopping cravings, and providing a manageable course to combat addiction.

Case Report: A 36-year-old Caucasian female, Ms. Elana W. has been a patient of our pain management clinic for many years. Her medical history consists of chronic pain syndrome, cervical disc disorder with myelopathy, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, spinal stenosis, along with pain in unspecified joints due to suspected sarcoidosis. She explained that her pain has always been debilitating, leaving her unable to leave her bed on most days of the week. She has been on high doses of opioids for many years without sufficient pain control but with severe unwanted side effects such as drowsiness, dizziness, and nausea. It wasn't until Belbuca was added to her regimen that she was able to begin to function normally and retain control of her life again. The initial difference she encountered was being able to physically get up in the morning and an increase in her energy levels.

In November 2021, Belbuca was added to her regimen and slowly increased up to 900mg tablets. Response has been positive and side effects from previous opioids have decreased. She has been able to take charge of her health and is currently following up with her rheumatologist for evaluation for sarcoidosis. She continues to attend monthly visits at our clinic as well.

Some of the drawbacks experienced by our patient were mainly due to difficulty obtaining the medication in many pharmacies. She explained that it was hard for her to find a reliable vendor due to the limited places that this drug was available at. Additionally, our patient mentioned the price to be very high and it was not possible to receive an extension on a coupon that she had previously received. She remains concerned that she was only given a three-month price reduction and is unsure how she will continue to afford future prescriptions.

Speaker Biography

Kinga Grzybowski completed her Bachelor of Arts at St. John's University in New York City in 2018 at the age of 23 and moved to Poland for Medical School to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor. She has five years of experience as a licensed pharmacy technician, worked as a research assistant in the Anesthesiology department at New York Presbyterian Hospital Queens and presented multiple Psychology posters at conferences throughout the US during her undergraduate years. She currently serves as an executive board member of AMSA at her school and hopes to apply for residency this year.

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