

# How-To: How to Refer Patients to an Addiction Specialist

### Clinical tips and advice about:

- When to refer patients to specialized substance abuse treatment
- How to find addiction specialists and psychosocial treatment providers in your area
- How to talk to a patient about referral to an addiction specialist
- What information to provide patients when you refer them for buprenorphine or other substance abuse treatment

### ***Plus resources on each page with additional tips and tools!***

Written by [Clinical Tools, Inc.](#)

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Reviewed by [experts in buprenorphine treatment](#)

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## When to Refer Patients to Specialized Substance Abuse Treatment

Primary care providers who do not prescribe buprenorphine should refer opioid-dependent patients to a specialist either another provider or a substance abuse treatment center whenever:

- A brief assessment and intervention is not an adequate treatment.
- You suspect or confirm that patients are using or abusing opioids or other illicit drugs.
- Patients have a complicated medical or substance abuse history and require intensive treatment.
- Patients request a referral to substance abuse treatment.

Primary care providers who are prescribing buprenorphine should consider referral to an addiction specialist or substance abuse treatment center in certain cases:

- Patient has a complicated medical, psychiatric, social, or substance abuse history and requires more intensive or structured treatment than you can provide in the office setting.
- Patient is non-compliant with your office policies or treatment protocol.

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- Patient is requesting transfer from high-dose methadone maintenance or is dependent on other high-dose long-acting opioids or short-acting opioids.
- You are over your patient-prescribing limit (providers can treat up to 30 patients simultaneously during the first year that they are waived. You can apply for a waiver to treat 100 patients per year after that, and then apply to treat 275 patients after being waived for 100 patients for a year).

Remember that all providers who are prescribing buprenorphine and managing patient care themselves should refer patients to psychosocial treatment services.

**Related Resources:** [TIP 42 Chapter 6: Traditional Settings and Models](#)

**Description:** This chapter discusses the treatment approaches and models available to those working with patients with substance abuse disorders.

**Source:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [General information - opioid addiction](#)

**Tags:** [Addiction](#)

[Dependence](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Just became waived](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

## [CTI Referral Form for Substance Abuse Treatment](#)

**Description:** Form3used for referral to substance abuse treatment or counseling.

This form is for use by a primary care provider to refer a patient for substance abuse treatment. It could also be used to refer the patient for counseling.

**REFERRAL FORM**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Referring Doctor's Information	Referring to (Doctor, Clinic):
_____ Name	_____ Name
_____ Address	_____ Address
_____ City, State, Zipcode	_____ City, State, Zipcode
_____ Phone(s)	_____ Phone(s)
_____ Fax	_____ Fax
_____ Email	_____ Email

**Patient Information**

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Ok to leave voice messages at this number? ( ) Y ( ) N

Best days/times to be reach the patient: \_\_\_\_\_

Insurance provider(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Is substance abuse treatment covered? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No/Unknown

Reason for referral \_\_\_\_\_

Opiate and other substance history (include current and past addiction/abuse of alcohol, prescription drugs, and illegal drugs; treatment history): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medications: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE

**REFERRAL FORM (PAGE 2 OF 2)**

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Test results and dates: (Hepatitis C, liver enzymes, urine test) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other Medical History (include psychiatric diagnosis if any): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Referring Doctor Signature

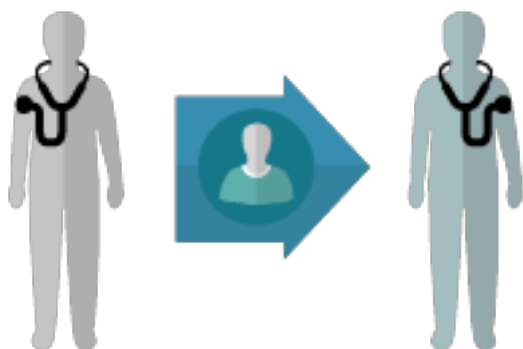
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient Signature

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Topics: [Referral](#)

### Locating Addiction Specialists and Psychosocial Treatment Providers



Physicians who do not want to prescribe buprenorphine should maintain a list of local treatment providers where they can refer patients when opioid use disorder is identified or suspected.

Physicians who are starting a buprenorphine practice should assemble a list of treatment providers in their area where you can refer patients for psychosocial treatment. It is also helpful to contact a few other buprenorphine providers in your area in case a consultation is needed, a complication arises, for back-up for vacations, or for other unforeseen emergencies (so that patients can still get treatment or prescriptions if you are unavailable).

**Related Resources:** [Psychosocial aspects of treatment in patients receiving buprenorphine/naloxone](#)

**Description:** Guideline document discussing the psychosocial treatment buprenorphine patients should receive.

**Source:** Physician Clinical Support System (PCSS-MAT)

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field\_vote:

Topics: [General information - opioid addiction](#)  
[Stabilization and maintenance](#)

Tags: [Maintenance](#)

[Psychosocial](#)

[Suboxone](#)

Physician stage in practice: [Just became waived](#)

[SAMHSA's Buprenorphine Physician and Treatment Program Locator](#)

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**Description:** A directory of treatment programs and physicians authorized to treat patients with buprenorphine.

**Source:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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**field\_vote:**

**Topics:** [General information - buprenorphine](#)

[Referral](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Need to refer](#)

**Resource Type:** [Misc. informational materials](#)

**Tags:** [DATA 2000](#)

[Locator](#)

[Referral](#)

[Suboxone](#)

[NAABT Local Addiction Resource Finder](#)

**Description:** Search tool where a patient or physician can enter their zipcode and receive a listing of the closest buprenorphine counselors, pharmacies, treatment facilities, and support groups.

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**Source:** The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment (NAABT)

**field\_vote:**

**Topics:** [Getting a waiver/setting up your practice](#)

[Referral](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

**Resource Type:** [Misc. informational materials](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

**Patient Handouts:** [Buprenorphine treatment for heroin addiction](#)

[Finding treatment and therapy](#)

**Tags:** [Addiction](#)

[Behavioral therapy](#)

[Dependence](#)

[Detoxification](#)

[Locator](#)

[Pharmacy](#)

[Psychosocial](#)

[Referral](#)

[Suboxone](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Becoming waived](#)

[Experienced prescriber](#)

[Just became waived](#)

[Need to refer](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

[Brochure for Buprenorphine Patient/Physician Matching System](#)

**Description:** This brochure provides information for patients on how to locate a physician certified to provide buprenorphine treatment.

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**Source:** The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment (NAABT)

**field\_vote:**

**Topics:** [Patient education materials](#)

**Resource Type:** [Patient education materials](#)

**Patient Handouts:** [Finding treatment and therapy](#)

**Tags:** [DATA 2000](#)

[Induction](#)

[Addiction](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Need to refer](#)

### [Listing of State Agencies and Organizations](#)

**Description:** A listing of websites and other contact information for state agencies that regulate substance dependence treatment. Many provide resources to assist patients or physicians in identifying treatment providers.

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[Narcotics Anonymous: Find A Meeting](#)

**Description:** This page provides a search form for regional branches of Narcotics Anonymous to locate meetings in a specific area.

**Source:** Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

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**field\_vote:**

**Tags:** [Addiction](#)

[Behavioral therapy](#)

[Locator](#)

### [Referral](#)

Physician stage in practice: [Just became waived](#)

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Resource Type: [Misc. informational materials](#)

Patient Handouts: [Addiction](#)

[Finding treatment and therapy](#)

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Topics: [Referral](#)

## Talking to Patients About Referral to an Addiction Specialist

Some patients will resist or flatly deny substance abuse. However, if you suspect substance abuse and referral to addiction treatment is warranted, then you must discuss the issues with the patient. Explain to patients and their significant others that:

- Addiction is a treatable chronic disease
- You want to give them the best treatment and so you are referring them to a specialist much like you would do for other chronic diseases
- When stabilized, patients may return to the primary care provider for on-going care, while the addiction specialist can continue to provide the buprenorphine treatment

Skillful, empathetic interviewing is key and specific approaches should be followed when discussing substance abuse with patients.

### Try these sensitive interviewing techniques when recommending a referral:

- Use the "Ask-Tell-Ask" approach:
  1. Ask permission to discuss something with them
  2. Tell them your concerns
  3. Ask what they thought about what you said
- Remember your role as a health provider - explain that you need to discuss drug use because you are concerned about their health and explain why you are recommending a referral. Point out the direct relationship between their drug use and any health or social consequences they might have experienced.
- Provide as much information as possible about the provider/clinic where you are referring the patient; if you speak with confidence and knowledge about the treatment center, patients are more likely to respond more positively.



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- Maintain the patient's privacy - conduct the interview in private and do not bring up the substance abuse or referral around other staff members, family, or friends without the patient's permission.

**Related Resources:** [Substance Use Disorders: A Guide to the Use of Language](#)

**Description:** A guide for using non-stigmatizing language when working with patients who have substance use disorders.

**Source:** The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment (NAABT)

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [General information - opioid addiction](#)

**Tags:** [Dependence](#)

[Addiction](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Just became waived](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

[TIP 35: Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment](#)

**Description:** Guide on using motivation to effect substance abuse treatment. Includes information on motivational interviewing, integrating motivational approaches into treatment, and measuring patient motivation.

**Source:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [General information - opioid addiction](#)

**Tags:** [Behavioral therapy](#)

[Psychosocial](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Just became waived](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

[TIP 42 Chapter 5. Strategies for Working with Clients with Co-occurring Disorders](#)

**Description:** Provides physicians with information on how to work with a patient who has co-occurring disorders, including how to engage the patient in treatment and how to develop a successful therapeutic relationship.

**Source:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [Special populations](#)

**Tags:** [Comorbidities](#)

[Complicated patients](#)

[Special populations](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Just became waived](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

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**Topics:** [Referral](#)

## Providing Information to Patients Referred for Buprenorphine or Other Substance Abuse Treatment



Patients who have been referred for buprenorphine treatment may be anxious about what to expect. You can help ease patient concerns by providing some patient education materials about topics, such as:

- substance abuse treatment
- including information about how buprenorphine works
- what treatment entails
- benefits of treatment and recovery

See our list of downloadable [patient education materials](#).

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**Related Resources:** [Buprenorphine Education Materials](#)

**Description:** This web page provides educational materials on buprenorphine treatment including information on different stages of treatment, patient stories, educational essays, and a glossary.

**Source:** The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment (NAABT)

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**field\_vote:**

**Topics:** [Logistics of buprenorphine treatment](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

**Resource Type:** [Misc. informational materials](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

**Patient Handouts:** [About buprenorphine](#)

**Tags:** [Dependence](#)

[Detoxification](#)

[Addiction](#)

[Precautions](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Buprenorphine Brochure](#)

**Description:** This printable patient brochure provides information about opioid dependence, buprenorphine, DATA 2000, and finding treatment.

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**Source:** National Alliance of Advocates for Addiction Treatment (NAABT)

**field\_vote:**

**Topics:** [Logistics of buprenorphine treatment](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

**Resource Type:** [Patient education materials](#)

**Patient Handouts:** [About buprenorphine](#)

[About opioid dependence and addiction](#)

[Finding treatment and therapy](#)

**Tags:** [DATA 2000](#)

[Dependence](#)

[Suboxone](#)

[Addiction](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Just became waived](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

[Experienced prescriber](#)

[Need to refer](#)

### [Methadone vs. Buprenorphine. A Comparison of Cognitive Performance](#)

**Description:** A comparison of cognitive performance outcomes of patients maintained on methadone versus those maintained on buprenorphine/naloxone during early opioid substitution treatment.

**Source:** Rapeli et al. BMC Clin Pharmacol.2007; 12;7:5.

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [General information - opioid addiction](#)

[General information - buprenorphine](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Experienced prescriber](#)

[Just became waived](#)

**Resource Type:** [Journal abstract](#)

**Tags:** [Dependence](#)

[Methadone](#)

### [Methadone and Buprenorphine for the Management of Opioid Dependence](#)

**Description:** A systematic review and economic evaluation of methadone and buprenorphine for the management of opioid dependence.

**Source:** Health Technology Assessment; Vol 11: number 9. Connock et al., 2007.

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field\_vote:

**Topics:** [General information - buprenorphine](#)

[Special populations](#)

**Physician stage in practice:** [Becoming waived](#)

[Experienced prescriber](#)

[Just became waived](#)

[Need to refer](#)

[Setting up a practice](#)

**Resource Type:** [Journal article](#)

**Tags:** [Cost of treatment](#)

[Dependence](#)

[Methadone](#)

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**Topics:** [Referral](#)

[Patient education materials](#)

### Summary

- Physicians who do not prescribe buprenorphine should refer opioid-dependent patients to a physician who can treat them. Physicians who prescribe buprenorphine may also find it necessary to refer a patient to a specialist, for example, if the patient is non-compliant, has other complicating conditions, or is currently on a high dose of methadone.
- Online data bases of buprenorphine providers and treatment centers can help you find addiction specialists.
- When talking to a patient about referral, emphasize that addiction is a treatable, chronic disease; a referral is indicated as it would be for any chronic disease; and that the patient may return to the primary practice for ongoing care.
- Use sensitive interviewing techniques, such as "Ask-Tell-Ask" when recommending a referral
- Provide printed patient education material when making a referral

*The End*



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