

Physician Assistants Can Now Qualify to Prescribe for Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Addiction

In July 2016, federal law was amended to allow physician assistants and nurse practitioners to qualify to prescribe buprenorphine for medication-assisted treatment (MAT). Until that time, only physicians could prescribe for MAT. The Board has received many inquiries about how a physician assistant can qualify.

In order to prescribe for MAT, a clinician must obtain what is frequently referred to as *X-license* or a *DATA waiver*. DATA stands for *Drug Abuse Treatment Act (of 2000)*, the law that legalized the prescribing of buprenorphine by physicians outside of an Opioid Treatment Program. The waiver program is administered by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

IMPORTANT:

- ◆ A PA or NP must complete 24 hours of specialized training to qualify for a DATA waiver.
- ◆ The 24 hours include the same 8-hour course that physicians are required to complete.
- ◆ PAs and NPs must complete an additional 16 hours of training.
- ◆ There are two critical things to remember about the 16-hours of additional training:
 - (1) The training must be by an organization that is approved for this specific purpose by SAMHSA.
 - (2) All 16 hours must be completed with the same approved organization.

Vermont physician assistants who are considering offering MAT services need to be aware of one additional requirement:

- ◆ **Physician assistants are authorized to perform only those medical services that are within the scope of practice of their primary supervising physician and delegated by the primary supervising physician.**
- ◆ PAs who are supervised by physicians who do not practice MAT have two options – encourage a current supervisor to take on MAT practice, or obtain an additional primary supervisor for the MAT aspect of practice.

Two websites offer everything a PA needs to learn about qualifying for and applying for a DATA waiver.

- 1) **[PCSS-MAT](#)**: an organization funded by SAMHSA grants that provides training, information, and other resources for MAT clinicians. There you can find information about accessing the PCSS-MAT training – which is all **free** to participants.
- 2) **[SAMHSA](#)**: There you can access the forms to apply, as well as a link to sign up for notices about training events.

[The Board's policy on MAT is available on our website.](#) The policy, established in 2014, has not yet been updated to reflect the change to the law to allow MAT practice by PAs, but it will be. For now, it should not be interpreted to prohibit PAs from becoming qualified and obtaining DATA waivers. Any licensee, PA or MD, with questions about obtaining a DATA waiver may contact the Board:

Phone: (802) 657-4220

Email: AHSMedicalBoard@vermont.gov.