



ASAM

The Voice of Addiction Medicine
American Society of Addiction Medicine

10/23/2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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American Society of Addiction Medicine commends Defense Department for decision to cover addiction medications

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) applauds the U.S. Department of Defense for its recent decision to allow coverage of medications for the treatment of drug addiction, so beneficiaries who suffer from this treatable chronic disorder can receive potentially life-saving drugs.

A recent [report](#) released by ASAM on FDA-approved medications to treat opioid addiction found these drugs to be effective, safe and cost-effective when used for long-term maintenance treatment. The study, by the Treatment Research Institute and The AVISA Group, found that the costs for these medications to treat opioid addiction are roughly comparable to costs for diabetes medications.

Drug overdose death rates in the United States have more than tripled since 1990, and today kill more people than traffic crashes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And yet, state governments and insurance companies regularly deny patients access to these medications that could save lives and help reverse the epidemic of opioid addiction.

"The Department of Defense has taken a leadership position in evidence-informed treatment of the disease of addiction," said Stuart Gitlow, MD, ASAM president. "Treatment professionals need every effective tool available to end suffering from this chronic disease. And now the military has wisely added addiction medications to the array of effective treatments for its beneficiaries with addictive disorders."

The new rule by the Defense Department to allow coverage of addiction medications by TRICARE, the health care program serving Uniformed Service members, retirees and their

families, noted that “exclusion of medication-assisted treatment ... is outdated” and said that the past policy was contrary to the current standard of practice and medical necessity.

ASAM President-Elect Jeffrey Goldsmith, MD, FASAM, who practices at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Cincinnati, OH, having worked recently in its Post-Traumatic Stress Clinic, said that states and private insurance companies need to follow suit and cover approved addiction medications as prescribed by addiction medicine professionals.

“Allowing specialists who treat PTSD and co-occurring conditions – including addiction – to use the full panoply of evidence-based treatment is critical, and the Defense Department should be commended for recognizing this,” Goldsmith said.

“But it’s not just important for military personnel. All payers need to stop arbitrary limits on FDA-approved medications for addiction. There’s no other chronic disease where effective treatment is blocked like it is for the disease of addiction.”

The new TRICARE rule stated that service members returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with severe and painful injuries may require long-term pain management with medications that have the potential for addiction. “This reality makes it ever more important to ensure that all medically or psychologically necessary and appropriate medical care for substance use disorders is available to our TRICARE beneficiaries.”

The [American Society of Addiction Medicine](#) is a national medical specialty society representing over 3,000 physicians and associated professionals. Its mission is to increase access to and improve the quality of addiction treatment, to educate physicians, and other health care providers and the public, to support research and prevention, to promote the appropriate role of the physician in the care of patients with addictive disorders, and to establish Addiction Medicine as a specialty recognized by professional organizations, governments, physicians, purchasers and consumers of health care services and the general public. ASAM was founded in 1954, and has had a seat in the American Medical Association House of Delegates since 1988.

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