



VIP RESEARCH

Experiences, perceptions, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual care among Veterans with opioid use disorder: a mixed-methods study

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: The COVID-19 pandemic changed how health care is delivered to patients with opioid use disorder (OUD), but patient preferences and experiences with virtual care for OUD are largely unknown. Understanding the health-related impacts of the pandemic on patients with OUD and their experiences with virtual care delivery may provide important insights to address the worsening opioid crisis.

METHODS: Using a concurrent mixed methods design, we conducted semi-structured interviews and short-answer surveys among 20 Veterans with OUD participating in primary care-based buprenorphine treatment at a specialized Veterans Affairs clinic for patients with high-risk comorbidities. Our objectives were to 1) describe the pandemic impact on health among a Veteran population with high-risk co-morbidities (e.g., mental illness, homelessness), and 2) describe virtual care experiences during this time.

RESULTS: Participants reported increased isolation and loneliness (n=15, 75%), mental illness (n=17, 85%), substance use (n=4, 20%), chronic pain (n=6, 30%), new and recurring health problems (n=7, 35%), and financial challenges (n=7, 35%) since the pandemic began. Most participants (n=19, 95%) reported personal access to a smart phone and use of virtual care since COVID-19, including telephone (n=16, 80%) or synchronous video (n=8, 40%). Some Veterans favored virtual care for ease of prescription management, convenience in completing appointments, and ease of scheduling, while others expressed concerns that provider interactions are impersonal, appointment logistics cumbersome, communication fragmented, and recovery programs/groups ineffective. Veterans consistently reported virtual buprenorphine treatment as safe and effective.

CONCLUSIONS: Patients with OUD reported increased levels of loneliness, mental illness, and pain during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual buprenorphine treatment was considered to be safe, convenient and effective. Addressing the opioid crisis in the age of virtual care will likely require new strategies to maintain clinical connections and mitigate pandemic loneliness, mental illness, and pain. (Please note that these findings are preliminary analysis and more info coming soon).

BUP & OUD DATA, SALT LAKE CITY AND CBOC'S, UT

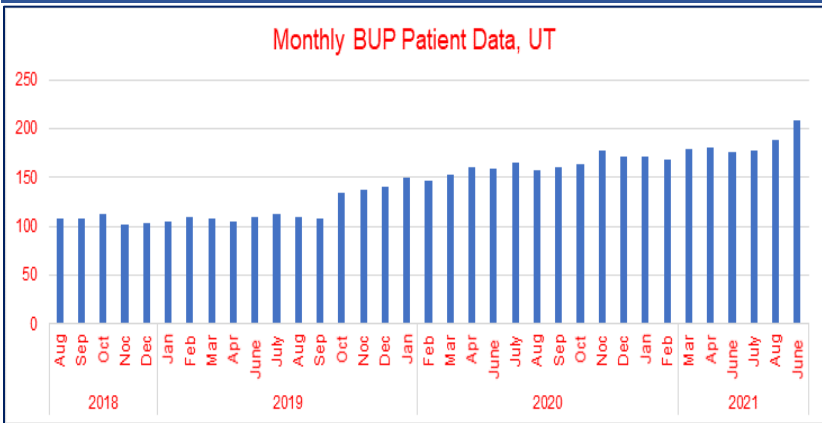


Table with 4 columns: Quality Indicator, Score (%), National Avg (%), and Actionable. Rows include: Treating Opioid Use Disorder, X-Waivered Providers, and various metrics like % OUD Patients with OUD Pharmacotherapy, % OUD Patients with Naloxone Kit, etc.

PUBLICATION

Jones AL, Gordon AJ, Gabrielian SE, Montgomery AE, Blosnich JR, Varley AL, deRussy AJ, Austin EL, Hoge AE, Kim YI, Gelberg L, Kertesz SG. Perceptions of Care Coordination Among Homeless Veterans Receiving Medical Care in the Veterans Health Administration and Community Care Settings: Results From a National Survey. Med Care. 2021 Jun 1;59(6):504-512. doi: 10.1097/MLR.0000000000001547. PMID: 33827108; PMCID: PMC8119353.

BUPRENORPHINE WAIVER TRAININGS:

Upcoming X-Waiver Trainings and waiver news (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33798034/) 7/22/2021 11am to 3:15pm EST Dr. Ellen Edens