

Association Supports Counselor Involvement in New Drug Therapy

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[Richard Schmitz](#)

703/741-7686, ext. 116

NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals, joined the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in Washington, D.C., today in support of the federal agency's professional and public education initiative to raise awareness about a new medication, buprenorphine, that can be used to treat addiction to opioids, such as OxyContin and heroin.

Unlike other medications to treat addiction, buprenorphine can be prescribed by physicians in their own offices.

"This is an exciting development," John Avery, NAADAC director of public policy, said. "For the first time, physicians will be able to prescribe medication in their office that combats addiction. This greatly expands the treatment options for opiate-dependent patients, many of whom currently have no access to treatment."

While supporting buprenorphine, NAADAC says the drug's ultimate success depends on its integration into a broader continuum of health care services that includes counseling for patients with substance use disorders.

"Pharmacotherapy must be reinforced with behavioral treatment counseling to ensure medication compliance and to increase patient functioning," Avery said. "This is the role of the addiction professional, to work with primary care physicians to improve treatment outcomes and guide patients on the path to recovery."

SAMHSA unveiled educational materials called "New Paths to Recovery" that provide physicians with the information they need to administer buprenorphine therapy. Community education forums and buprenorphine trainings for physicians will be held in 13 U.S. cities and in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 2003.