

3. WHAT NEEDS TO BE IN PLACE BEFORE INITIATING BUPRENORPHINE SUBSTITUTION

Policies and procedures for buprenorphine clinics to establish prior to initiating opioid dependence treatment

- ✦ Establish policies and procedures for buprenorphine treatment (outpatient delivery in supervised settings - directly observed treatment)
- ✦ Plans for staff education and training
- ✦ Backup coverage for the absence or leave of the medical doctor / core team
- ✦ Assurance of the privacy and confidentiality of addiction treatment information
- ✦ Linkages with other drug treatment services, who will accept referrals for other forms of treatment (e.g., abstinence oriented approaches; psycho-social interventions)
- ✦ A referral network of medical specialists
- ✦ Timely physical examinations
- ✦ Linkages with medical treatment facilities including HIV treatment and care
- ✦ Linkages with addiction and psychiatric treatment programmes (e.g., detoxification centres, psychiatric clinics)
- ✦ Listing of community referral resources, including specific self-help groups who would welcome patients on buprenorphine substitution

Buprenorphine is listed under Schedule III of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Given the lax drug control measures in South Asia, there is a fear that buprenorphine used in drug maintenance treatment may be diverted to the black market. Reducing the diversion of buprenorphine to the black market can be achieved by observing certain procedures strictly. Currently, the drug is licensed and can be prescribed for heroin dependence in India by specified drug de-addiction centres notified by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Procedures have been laid down for procuring, storing and documenting the distribution of medication. It is essential that the agencies responsible for buprenorphine treatment are completely aware of the legal and regulatory procedures related to this drug in their respective countries and strictly adhere to them.

Assessment of the capacity of the agencies

The capacity of the agencies that will be establishing the buprenorphine clinic has to be assessed. Given the nature of the treatment and the regulatory procedures, it is important that to begin with, the services are provided by clinics at medical colleges, university hospitals, major government hospitals and recognised drug treatment services.