

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

Dear Commissioner

You will all be aware of the impact coronavirus is having on our families, communities and society. The first priority for Change Grow Live is supporting people on opioid medication-assisted treatment (MAT) during these difficult times, and we wanted to keep you informed of our thinking and approach as it evolves over the coming weeks.

People using our services are likely to be at significantly greater risk from complications of coronavirus compared with the general population. It is highly likely that existing regimes such as daily pick up and supervised consumption may not be sustainable as the pandemic situation further impacts ancillary services and restricts free movement. Right now, nobody wants to be making trips out to public places unless absolutely necessary. We understand this and will do what we can to ensure safe and reliable access to MAT for all those who need it.

We believe, on balance, that the risk of harm to a person is greater off MAT than the risks of being given a takeaway supply of meds. Therefore, we intend to take the following measures to mitigate the impact of coronavirus on people in receipt of MAT:

1. Individuals who already have take home MAT will be provided with two weeks supply.
2. Those on supervised consumption will move to unsupervised and will be provided with two weeks take-home supply.
3. Detoxifications and dose reductions will be deferred, with people encouraged to maintain stability during this period of uncertainty.
4. New assessments and re-starts will be offered buprenorphine as first choice and will be able to take away unsupervised titration doses for a total of two weeks.
5. Methadone induction will require daily collection at pharmacy in the first week, followed by take-home doses when appropriate.
6. If only remote assessments are possible, and people are unable to provide a drug test – only buprenorphine titration based on an adequate history will be possible.
7. If people are advised to self-isolate, but are not being treated in hospital, they will be asked to nominate an individual to collect the prescription on their behalf and will be provided with a two week supply of medication. If they cannot nominate an individual to do this, where possible, a staff member will collect and deliver the medication.
8. The above will be supported with:
  - Provision of Take-home Naloxone
  - Safe storage boxes
  - Harm reduction advice
  - Regular communication with first-line support

We are taking these measures to ensure that to the best of our ability service users can continue to receive their medication and also limit undue pressures on stock availability of medications through allowing for larger take home supplies. We will be in direct contact with pharmacies around the timing of prescription changes to plan for adequate stock management.

The situation and government advice is changing on a day by day basis, and we are trying to best mitigate any risks and unintended consequences. However, it is possible that despite our



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best efforts there may be incidents that occur during this period. We will be monitoring the situation closely and our approach may change as a result of learning.

Everyone is working incredibly hard right now, and we want to work as closely as we can with all our partners in the community. We know these changes are a significant departure from our usual delivery and that this will impact your own work and planning, and I'd ask that we keep in close dialogue so we can continue to work together for the best and safest outcomes for the people who use our services.

Thanks very much for your support, and please get in touch with your local change grow live contact at any time.

Kind Regards

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