

Talking Points for...

Supporting the Development of Self-Advocacy Skills

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Purpose: Patients receiving MAT often face concurrent legal issues, and they may encounter resistance from legal professionals and other related services regarding the use of MAT. MAT providers should consider helping patients develop the ability to explain their course of treatment, self-advocate, and to troubleshoot ways to explain MAT when they receive conflicting recommendations. The questions and talking points below can help the provider navigate this. You may want to consider adapting these questions to a simple worksheet for patients to complete on their own or in a clinical or group setting.

Questions and Answers:

- What medication(s) are you taking?
 - Patient should be able to list the medication they are using.
 - “My doctor prescribed me [Medication].”
 - Patient may also want to offer that MAT is part of a full treatment plan that includes monitoring or other services.
 - “It’s not just a medicine. My doctor developed a full treatment plan for me that includes groups, individual counseling [or whatever other supports patient receives].”
- What is the dosage?
 - Patient should be able to mention the indication, dose, frequency, route, and time of administration..
 - “I take [dosage] of [Medication] by [route] every morning for [indication].”
 - Patient may want to include how often they visit the provider for evaluations and refills.
 - “Every [duration], I go back to the doctor to get reassessed and get a refill.”
- Why do you take it?
 - Help the patient learn to emphasize the medical nature of substance use disorder.
 - “I am diagnosed with [substance use disorder]. Like any diabetes or high blood pressure meds, MAT helps me treat this disease and keeps me healthy.”
 - It may help the patient to emphasize that the provider made an individual assessment and recommended this course of treatment.
 - “My doctor took the time to evaluate my case, and this was their clinical recommendation.”
 - Help the patient understand the expectations of MAT and what otherwise would occur if the patient were not taking MAT.



- Are there any side effects you've noticed that might concern others? How do you explain them?
 - Side effects that mimic intoxication may make law enforcement, legal professionals or other service providers assume they are using substances again.
 - Help the patient identify the types of side effects they may personally experience that may appear like intoxication.
 - “Sometimes [Medication] makes me [groggy or other applicable side effect]. This is a side effect of the medication. My doctor told me that it is common and works with me to adjust my dose so that I experience less side effects.”
 - Help the patient understand the effects that they would otherwise experience if they were using illicit prescription drugs vs. those effects while being on MAT.
 - “Although I experience the side-effect, I am still able to function appropriately and with purpose, compared to the side-effects I would have experienced while using illicit opioids.”

- Are you just replacing one addiction for another?
 - This is a commonly held misperception about MAT and one your patient may encounter in various contexts.
 - Help the patient understand what addiction actually means.
 - Help them identify a short personal phrase that counters this wrongly held belief.
 - “No, MAT is a medical treatment for a medical condition, like any other. [Medication] helps my body work properly when it wasn't before—like insulin for someone living with diabetes. It also helps me to focus on what is important in my life, such as achieving my own life goals. Most importantly, it lets me take control of my life and overcome addiction.”

- How can you care for a child [or do other relevant activity] while taking [medication]?
 - Because of actual or assumed side-effects, legal professionals and related providers may assume that patients cannot do a particular activity or adequately care for their home or child.
 - This is why learning about possible side effects and distinguishing ones they would otherwise experience from not using MAT is crucial for patients.
 - “Some people worry MAT might make me too [drowsy or other side effect] to care for my child. I don't experience that side effect.”
 - “Unlike when I was using [heroin, fentanyl, or other other opioid(s)], I feel 'normal' and not high when I take MAT and don't have cravings or withdrawal symptoms.”
 - “I do experience [side effect], but I have a plan in place (e.g. my family member is there for the hour of the day when my side effects occur until they subside).”

