Current Medication-Assisted Treatment Practices and Perceived Barriers in Midwestern United States Community Corrections

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Texas Christian University, Behavioral Research Institute, Fort Worth, TX
Addiction Health Services Research Annual Meeting (AHSR), Fairfax, VA October 2011

Abstract

Offenders are at high risk for relapse immediately following discharge from incarceration and during community supervision. While pharmacotherapy may be an available treatment option for those addicted to opioids or alcohol, low referral rates for this treatment option appear to be a byproduct of misperceptions and lack of knowledge about medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for treating drug addiction. This study examined current MAT referral practices in two community corrections settings where addiction pharmacotherapy is currently available. Perceived barriers to MAT referral, as reported by corrections and treatment providers during interviews conducted as part of the CDAATS Medication-Assisted Treatment Implementation in Community Correctional Environment (MATICCE) study, are addressed. The findings are discussed in the context of an organizational intervention strategy aimed at effectively implementing improvements in MAT service delivery by enhancing knowledge about MAT and improving inter-organisational linkages and collaboration between criminal justice supervision settings and community-based treatment settings.

Introduction

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is one focus area in the second phase of Criminal Justice Drug Abuse Treatment Studies (CDAATS II), the first major initiative by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in the field of implementation science. Ten research centers currently have studies in the field, focused on understanding and improving the implementation of evidenced-based practices (associated with MAT) in criminal justice offender populations. The study aims (below) define the objectives of the Organizational Linkage intervention being tested.

MATICCE Study Aims

- Aim 1: Improve service coordination between community correctional (CC) agencies and local MAT-providing treatment agencies via an implementation intervention targeting staff knowledge and interorganizational relationships.
- Aim 2: Increase the number of CC clients linked with MAT.
- Aim 3: Improve CC agents’ knowledge and perceptions about MAT, information about referral resources, and intent to refer appropriate clients to community-based MAT services through the KPI (Knowledge, Perceptions & Information) intervention.

Qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews are reported in the present examination as an exploration (similar to a type of case study approach) of perceived barriers and facilitators to making referrals to MAT; these target Aim 1 and Aim 3 above. Qualitative data also provide an opportunity to explain in more detail the mechanisms underlying quantitative results, thus the qualitative outcomes summarized here are presented as a preliminary step to analyses (qualitative and mixed methods) which are planned with a larger sample.

*Inclusion and Assessment: practices are two additional projects*

Methods

Sample

Respondents were staff (n = 8) from 2 Midwest community corrections settings where substance abuse treatment services are provided.

Table: Respondents Characteristics
- Field: 3 substance abuse treatment agencies
- Gender: 3 females, 5 males
- Role: 1 case management officer, 2 parole officer, 3-perspective program intake counselors, 3 substance abuse counselors, 3 substance abuse treatment program director

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The baseline interview guide was developed by the CDAATS II Research Cooperative to gauge the acceptability of MAT within the CC organisational culture.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please describe your role in your organization. What do you do exactly?
2. What do you, personally, think about medication assisted treatment such as methadone or naltrexone?
3. In general, how would you describe your organization’s current views towards medication assisted treatment for opioid problems?
4. Does your organization currently provide direct referrals to medication assisted treatment for opioid and/or alcohol dependent probation/parolees?
5. How strong do you think your fellow staff members are in referring probation/parolees to medication assisted treatment?
6. Please describe the current relationship between your agency and MAT providers in the Community.
7. What needs to happen to create an official relationship between your organization and the MAT providers?

Procedures

Study participants were recruited to take part in baseline semi-structured interviews.

- Separate media consent
- 2-person interview (participant and researcher)
- Audio-recorded in private setting
- Recordings transcribed by 3 researchers
- Transcripts coded with Atlas.ti 6.2 software

Coding Transcripts

- Transcripts were read and themes were identified by 3 coders
- Coders met and discussed potential subthemes for barrier factors
- Data dictionary was developed
- Transcripts coded for organizational and staff demographics
- Organizations/staff model was conceptualized and code hierarchy was shifted from barriers to organizational and individual themes
- Organizations/staff codes were then flagged as facilitating or barrier factors (a comparison approach to running queries)
- Reliability and validity: consensus coding approach (Reissinger et al., 2011)

Conceptual Model

The model shown below illustrates the guiding framework for examining perceived barriers and facilitators to MAT options in community correctional settings. Organisational and staff attributes have been shown to influence linkages between agencies in service delivery continuums in health-related services (Sebelsta et al., 2006) and substance abuse treatment (McGovern et al., 2006).

Baseline Semi-Structured Interview Guide Community Corrections and TASC Survey Respondents

- Knowledge relates to understanding the process-how medications for assisted treatment work; training on how to use MAT; and/or the respondent’s perceptions about his or her agency’s understanding of how MAT is provided.
- Agency attitudes: Respondent’s perception of agency position in MAT as a treatment option for addiction or mental health problems. This attitude might promote the MAT referral process.
- Resources: Resources related to funding, staff resources, and availability of services, etc.
- Current organizational relationships: Respondent’s perceptions of the organizational climate between current agency and community MAT providers.
- MATTICE Study Sample

All of the residential treatment programs now are designed for those individuals who have Medicaid, which is predominantly [for] women.

Response Coded as Facilitative Factor

I don’t know how inserted everybody at the MAT [provider] was in making this program really successful.

In the Department of Corrections most of the parole agents are...poorly trained in any kind of substance abuse issues.

With methadone in particular my knowledge...is that sometimes the medication itself can be the new habit.

I don’t think that maybe all the folks on the line...staff level are all on board with [MAT]...

The director here encouraged my involvement to become a MAT specialist.

It’s a good, new tool. A good, new supplement to the traditional psycho-social treatment approaches...

Family: Staff Characteristics

- Personal views about MAT, Personal experience, and Coworker attitudes about MAT have been grouped into a Family labeled Staff Characteristics. Quotes are not necessarily exclusive – for example, a respondent’s perceptions about a coworker’s attitude about MAT might be a judgment based on a coworker’s uneducated opinions due to a lack of training. In these instances, the quote was coded with the relevant themes (i.e., Coworker attitudes toward MAT and Knowledge) and flagged as a barrier factor. The absence of a quote for Personal Experience (Under Facilitative Quotes) indicates that no quotes for this theme were identified.

FAMILY: Organizational Characteristics

- Below, three codes (Personal views about MAT, Personal Experience, and Coworker attitudes about MAT) have been grouped into a Family labeled Staff Characteristics. Quotes are not necessarily exclusive – for example, a respondent’s perceptions about a coworker’s attitude about MAT might be a judgment based on a coworker’s uneducated opinions due to a lack of training. In these instances, the quote was coded with the relevant themes (i.e., Coworker attitudes toward MAT and Knowledge) and flagged as a barrier factor. The absence of a quote for Personal Experience (Under Facilitative Quotes) indicates that no quotes for this theme were identified.

Codes and supporting quotes are grouped by using the “Families” feature in Atlas.ti software to create a filter for selecting/grouping related codes which then can be utilized in conducting queries. In the orange box (below), four codes (Knowledge, Agency Support, Resources, and Current Interorganizational Relationships) have been grouped into a Family labeled Organizational Characteristics. The chart indicates prominent themes in white text boxes and less prominent in grey scale. Quotes are additionally coded as potential BARRIERS or potential FACILITATORS.

Coding Results

Response Coded as Facilitative Factor

So my response is in regards to the larger organization. I would say we’re cautious [about MAT for opiate problems]

In the Department of Corrections most of the parole agents are...poorly trained in any kind of substance abuse issues.

All of the residential treatment programs now are designed for those individuals who have Medicaid, which is predominantly [for] women.

Response Coded as Barrier Factor

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Current Interorganizational Relationships

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Staff Code Family

- Personal views about MAT: Barrier themes in this category varied, with some respondents expressing frustration about the role of the client in treatment; a desire for better evidence about the efficacy of MAT; and concerns about different types of MAT
- Personal experience: Not a prominent theme; but potentially an important theme for clinicians who have a personal history of addiction
- Coworker attitudes toward MAT: Respondents were equally split on judging coworkers’ attitudes toward MAT as supportive or non-supportive

In conclusion, a next step in qualitative analysis is investigating the relationship between agency affiliation and staff perspectives within and between agencies (using a larger sample) to gain a better understanding of organizational climate in relation to MAT.