



PATRICE A. HARRIS, MD, MA

PRESIDENT-ELECT

patrice.harris@ama-assn.org

ama-assn.org

t (312) 464-5618

f (312) 464-4094

August 7, 2018

The Honorable Rob Rappold
Mayor
City of Beckley
409 S Kanawha Street
Beckley, WV 25801

Dear Mayor Rappold:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing to provide background and a national perspective of the importance of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) as part of the solution to end the nation's opioid epidemic. Let me begin by noting that I spent my child and young adulthood, and graduated from college and medical school in West Virginia. I am proud of my West Virginia roots. I still have family and an extensive network of friends and colleagues who live throughout the state. Having grown up in Bluefield, I know Beckley very well, and I know that care for others and compassion in the community runs deep.

I also know that the opioid epidemic that continues to wreak havoc on every state in the nation has spared few in Beckley. It is hard to imagine anyone who has not been touched by loss. I think it also is true that many in Beckley and surrounding towns throughout West Virginia know of friends, family and neighbors who now are in recovery—many of them because of high quality, evidence-based treatment that includes MAT (such as methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone) combined with medical care, community, mental health and social support.

The evidence is unequivocal that MAT works. It reduces illicit drug use, and decreases disease rates for conditions such as HIV and hepatitis C. MAT saves families, communities and employers money; and it reduces crime. These are just some of the reasons why the National Institutes of Health says that “the safety and efficacy of medically assisted treatment has been unequivocally established.” It is why the leader of the National Institute on Drug Abuse says that “medications have also become an essential component of an ongoing treatment plan, enabling opioid-addicted persons to regain control of their health and their lives.”

We understand that there is deep concern rooted in Beckley about opening a clinic in a residential area to treat patients with opioid use disorder. Yours is not the first town to express such concerns. We agree with Beckley Police Department Chief Lonnie Christian that MAT clinics do not lead to increases in crime.

This is consistent with the views of the National Sheriffs' Association, which has expressed comprehensive support for MAT programs, including:

- Comprehensive and long-lasting substance use programs using existing pharmaceutical offerings (i.e., naltrexone, methadone, or suboxone) immediately upon release from custody;
- Reentry programs that offer a seamless community transition, including referrals for substance use counseling and recovery support navigation; and
- MAT programs that include additional treatment and recovery resources immediately upon release from custody.

Consider that in West Virginia, opioid prescriptions have decreased 37.6 percent from 2013-2017—the most in the nation, including a 13.8 percent decrease just from 2016-2017. Yet, there are more than 90 percent of persons needing—but not receiving—addiction treatment. At a time when the state is making strong progress to reverse the epidemic, the AMA urges you to consider doing everything possible to enhance access to treatment—and destigmatize MAT. This includes providing all necessary support to the physicians and other health care professionals working to bring care to Beckley. Barriers to accessing MAT will only serve to prolong the epidemic. We know that is not your intent, but we are concerned that would be the practical effect of zoning laws that prevent MAT clinics from opening where they are needed most.

The AMA would be pleased to discuss the information in this letter in more detail, including the underlying legal review if that would be helpful. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4954.

Sincerely



Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA

cc: Councilman Tom Sopher
Councilwoman Ann Worley
Councilman Tim R. Berry
Councilwoman Sherrie Hunter
Councilman Kevin Price
Councilwoman Janine Bullock
Councilman Frank Williams
West Virginia State Medical Association