



**Monday through Friday**

8:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.

**Saturdays & Holidays**

9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

**Sundays & Christmas**

Noon to 4:00 P.M.

## ***IT'S ABOUT PAIN***

A monthly service of Kirkpatrick Family Care

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### **METHADONE AND SUBOXONE**

Sometimes good things are bad things. Some solutions create new problems. So it is with methadone.

Methadone is cheap. Per GoodRx.com, 120 10mg tablets costs \$12.79, about 10 cents a tablet. It can provide long lasting relief. It is about the only long-acting opioid that is affordable among our injured workers (time loss pays about 60% of usual wages). Some people swear by it.

On the other hand, at least for some people, it has a very long "half-life" (the time after ingestion, that half the dose remains measurable in the blood). This can lead to suppressed breathing. Further, in some patients, methadone causes a long "QTc interval," making such patients at risk for sudden death.

A significant portion of deaths related to opioids are attributed to methadone. What makes interpretation of this data difficult is the fact that methadone is utilized as an alternative opioid for patients who are addicted to heroin. Some of these deaths may be related to intentional overdoses.

Most people try to avoid the use of methadone due to these safety concerns. If it is used, patients need to keep the dose as low as possible and have an ECG at least annually.

Suboxone (bupropion) is another drug with pluses and minuses. It was initially utilized as a low cost and safe alternative for heroin addicts. It is priced such that addicts could stay out of withdrawal and act as a safer, legal alternative to heroin. This drug reportedly has no tolerance buildup, so escalation of dose (common with other opioids) is unlikely to occur. For years, this drug was highly restricted, and a special license via DEA, was required in order to prescribe for, first, 15 patients. The number has been relaxed, but it has been reserved for use to benefit addicts.

Recently, Dr. Todd Korthuis of OHSU, a Longview native, has pioneered the use of suboxone or subutex for chronic pain patients. Again, inexpensive and low in side effects and risks. Sixty 8mg tablets cost \$107 at Fred Meyer.

But not everybody agrees the drug is safe. And though it is supposedly not abusable, a number of patients have told me they've bought it on the black market and found it helpful. This, of course, implies that some patients (addicts or pain victims) are selling at least some of the pills.

So, we'll see. At less than \$1 a day for Methadone and less than \$4 per day for subutex, these drugs are certainly less expensive than Fentanyl patches, Oxycontin, Exalgo, Opana ER and other long acting opioids.