MEDICAL BOARD POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES ON BUPRENORPHINE MAINTENANCE THERAPY FOR THE RECOVERING OPIOID DEPENDENT PHYSICIAN SEEKING A RETURN TO CLINICAL PRACTICE

C. L. Brown1,2,3,4,5, C. L. Adelman1,2,3,4,5,6, J. F. Lydon1, M. E. Lyon6 and T. V. Parran Jr1,2,3,4,5,6
1Addiction Medicine, Saint Vincent Charity Medical Center, USA, 2Windsor Laurelwood Center for Behavioral Medicine, 3Glenbeigh Hospital, 4Stella Maris Treatment Center, 5University Hospitals, Case and Elyria Medical Centers and 6Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Summary. Buprenorphine maintenance therapy for recovering opioid dependent physicians returning to practice is controversial, with concerns regarding neurocognition, despite treatment efficacy. This study’s objective was to survey state medical board policies regarding physicians on buprenorphine maintenance therapy seeking a return to clinical practice.

Methods. Fifty state medical boards were surveyed by phone and email to determine their policies regarding buprenorphine maintenance therapy for recovering physicians returning to practice.

Results. Sixteen state boards would not allow a physician on buprenorphine maintenance therapy to practice. Eight state boards have policies allowing the treatment. Still fifteen other state boards consider the issue on a case by case basis, but have no specific policy. Ten state boards have not responded to multiple requests for information, and state law precludes one board from interpreting statutes without formal rulemaking process.

Conclusions. Many state medical boards have a defined policy addressing buprenorphine maintenance therapy for physicians in recovery from opioid dependence. A number of boards allow physicians on buprenorphine maintenance therapy to practice, but a greater number preclude it. Many consider the issue on an individual basis. Further research on the safety and efficacy of buprenorphine maintenance therapy may broaden treatment policies for physicians with opioid dependence.