

A qualitative study of gabapentin use and misuse: Perspectives of substance abuse treatment providers

Mance E. Buttram, PhD and Steven P. Kurtz, PhD

Center for Applied Research on Substance Use and Health Disparities at Nova Southeastern University



Lisbon Addictions, 3rd European Conference on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies
23-25 October 2019

Funding and Conflicts

- This research was supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (R03 DA043613).
- The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and to not represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health or the National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- There are no conflicts of interest to report.

Gabapentin

- γ -aminobutyric acid (GABA)-analogue
- Treatment of epilepsy and neuralgia
- Prescribed off-label

- Low addictive liability level
- Prescription required
- Not scheduled under CSA
- Brands – Neurontin, Horizant, Gralise



Gabapentin misuse

Abuse and Diversion of Gabapentin Among Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Users in Appalachian Kentucky

Gabapentinoid Abuse in Order to Potentiate the Effect of Methadone: A Survey among Substance Misusers

Colin R.W. Baird^a Pauline Fox^b Lesley A. Colvin^a

Potentiation of the Effect of Buprenorphine/Naloxone With Gabapentin or Quetiapine

TO THE EDITOR: Although it is an effective treatment for opioid dependence, buprenorphine/naloxone may be misused. We report here a case of potentiation of buprenorphine/naloxone with gabapentin and quetiapine.

Gabapentin misuse, abuse and diversion: a systematic review

Rachel V. Smith^{1,2,3}, Jennifer R. Havens^{1,2} & Sharon L. Walsh^{1,4,5}

Prescription Medication Misuse Among Opioid Dependent Patients Seeking Inpatient Detoxification

Timothy Wilens, MD,^{1,2} Courtney Zulauf, BA,¹ Denece Ryland, RN,² Nicholas Carrellas, BA,¹ Isela Catalina-Wellington, RN, BSN²

An ethnographic decision model of the initiation of gabapentin misuse among prescription and/or illicit opioid (mis)users

Mance E. Buttram^{a,*}, Steven P. Kurtz^a, Theodore J. Cicero^b, Jennifer R. Havens^c

Gabapentin use during treatment

A Proof-of-Concept Randomized Controlled Study of Gabapentin: Effects on Cannabis Use, Withdrawal and Executive Function Deficits in Cannabis-Dependent Adults

Barbara J Mason¹, Rebecca Crean¹, Vivian Goodell¹, John M Light², Susan Quello¹, Farhad Shadan³, Kimberly Buffkins¹, Mark Kyle³, Murali Adusumalli³, Adnan Begovic³ and Santosh Rao³

Importance of Gabapentin Dose in Treatment of Opioid Withdrawal

Mehrdad Salehi, MD,* Gholam Reza Kheirabadi, MD,* Mohammad Reza Maracy, PhD,† and Mansour Ranjkesh, MD*

Original Investigation

Gabapentin Treatment for Alcohol Dependence
A Randomized Clinical Trial

Barbara J. Mason, PhD; Susan Quello, BA, BS; Vivian Goodell, MPH; Farhad Shadan, MD; Mark Kyle, MD; Adnan Begovic, MD

Gabapentin for the treatment of alcohol use disorder

Barbara J. Mason [Pearson Family Professor].

Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Pilot Trial of Gabapentin During an Outpatient, Buprenorphine-Assisted Detoxification Procedure

Nichole C. Sanders, PhD,² Michael J. Mancino, MD,³ W. Brooks Gentry, MD,⁴ J. Benjamin Guise, MD,⁵ Warren K. Bickel, PhD,⁶ Jeff Thostenson,⁷ and Alison H. Oliveto, PhD³

Aims

- Examine substance abuse treatment providers' experiences with gabapentin prescribed to clients during treatment and detox.
- How is gabapentin used in these settings?
- What are the benefits and risks for clients?

Methods

- Qualitative interviews with key informants
 - Currently working with opioid-dependent clients in a treatment or detox center
 - Specialized knowledge of treatment practices and client experiences
- Interviews conducted:
 - Between August 2018 and January 2019
 - South Florida
- Thematic analysis using descriptive and in vivo coding schemes

Characteristics of key informants

Title	Education	Years of experience	Setting
Program Director	Master of Social Work	6	Public-pay inpatient treatment center
Operations Supervisor	BA	7	Private-pay inpatient treatment center
Clinical Director	BA	25	Private-pay inpatient treatment center
Primary Therapist	MA, Counseling	10	Private-pay inpatient treatment center
Primary Therapist	MS, Family Therapy	7	Public-pay mental health facility
Primary Therapist	Master of Social Work	5	Public- and private-pay treatment center
Social Worker	Master of Social Work	15	Private-pay inpatient treatment center
Registered Nurse	BS, Nursing	2	Detoxification center
Clinical Director	MS, Psychology	8	Private-pay inpatient treatment center
Chief Exec. Officer	Master of Social Work	10	Intensive outpatient center
Therapist	MS, Counseling	25	Private practice
Therapist	MS, Counseling	15	Private practice

Therapeutic use

- Treat a physical and mental health symptoms which may interfere with treatment.
 - Cope with withdrawal
 - Stabilize mood
- “[Clients] might need something because [they’re] coming off serious drugs, feeling sick, and getting their faculties back.”
- “Gabapentin will indubitably help someone that’s experiencing anxiety and the vast majority of people that are recently sober are experiencing anxiety.”

Misuse among treatment clients

- Gabapentin does not have the same risks as opioids and is used as an alternative to other controlled medications.
- May occur following treatment because clients:
 - “believe they need something to cope with their symptoms.”
 - make an impulse decision due to boredom or social influences
- Gabapentin misuse is a potential first marker of relapse.
 - “Gabapentin misuse will precede a recurrence of heroin or crack or other drugs they would prefer to use.”
 - “They go from abusing gabapentin and Suboxone and Subutex... they go from that right back to their drug of choice... heroin, crack.”

Gabapentin use during treatment

- Policies regarding gabapentin administration vary.
- Clients may be allowed to take it for physical or mental health problems.
 - “There’s really no hesitancy to prescribe [gabapentin].”
 - “When clients are discharged, they’re given [gabapentin] as part of their discharge medication so they continue using it.”
- Four KIs said clients will be asked to taper gabapentin during treatment.
 - “Everyone’s becoming aware of [misuse] now. We always gotta stay ahead of the curve. If we see [gabapentin misuse] starting to develop, we gotta nip it.”

Lingering questions

- KIs had conflicting perceptions about gabapentin:
 - It is generally beneficial for clients
 - It may be misused by some clients
- “It would help people in the centers to know why gabapentin is being prescribed and all the multi-uses of it.”
- As to whether gabapentin should be prescribed to clients, “There’s no clear-cut answer. I’d love to hear somebody say there is. And it’s like, ‘Tell me!’”

Discussion

- According to KIs, gabapentin has several benefits for treatment clients:
 - Moderated withdrawal symptoms
 - Treatment of physical pain and mental distress
- Considering the setting and population, gabapentin misuse is not surprising.
- Possible first indication of relapse.
- KIs noted that more research is needed:
 - Clinical trials
 - “Real world” experiences in treatment and post-treatment settings

Limitations

- Experiences may not be representative of treatment providers in other settings or locations
- Small convenience sample from South Florida
- Potential for recall bias or interviewer effects.

Next steps

- Additional epidemiologic research among treatment clients
- How to best use gabapentin in treatment settings
- Effect of prescribed gabapentin on client recovery



Mance E. Buttram

mance.buttram@nova.edu

arsh.nova.edu

Center for Applied Research on Substance
Use and Health Disparities at Nova
Southeastern University

NSU
Florida