

MATs Play a Significant Role in EIS

“There are still some people who say we’re just trading one drug for another.”

Betty Wright, New Horizons Treatment, Rome



Betty Wright and LeGayle Davis of New Horizons MAT in Rome

Nine of the 40 agencies that make up Georgia’s HIV Early Intervention Services program are medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinics. Last year MAT clinics tested 713 clients for HIV and provided ongoing support to 7 patients who are HIV positive. This year testing is up with 903 HIV tests in the first three quarters* and ongoing support provided to 10 HIV positive clients.

**July 2016 - March 2017*

In the north Georgia mountains, less than 10 miles from the South Carolina Border, in the small town of Toccoa, Pittard Clinic more than doubled HIV testing over the course of a year. In the college town of Athens, DM &

ADR also increased HIV testing by more than 200%. How? By making it routine. “Our standard procedure is to give new patients a little time to get settled in treatment, then we flag them for HIV testing,” says Ali McCorkle program director at DM & ADR.

MAT combines behavioral therapy with medication to help clients with opioid addiction recover their lives. By taking regular doses of the right medication clients can stop using opioids without withdrawal. The most common medications used are methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone, and suboxone.

Clients may take medication for months, for years, or for a lifetime - returning to the clinic for medication, counseling, and medical supervision.

Once known as methadone clinics, these programs are now more accurately called medication-assisted treatment providers - in part to counter negative beliefs. “Methadone treatment has such a stigma,” says Ali McCorkle. “People think that all we do is medicate patients.” Betty Wright of New Horizons, an MAT clinic in Rome, adds, “There are still some who say we just trade one drug for another.”

Debunking Stigma

Study: Patients on methadone were over four times more likely to stay in treatment.

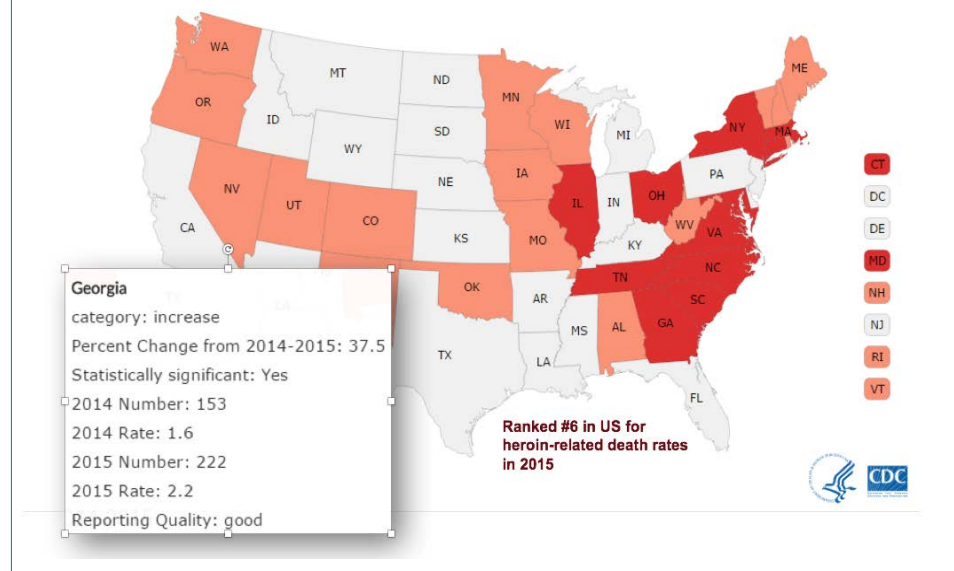
National Institute on Drug Abuse

In testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Dr. Nora Volkow of the National Institute on Drug Abuse Dr. Volkow recommended expansion of access to MAT, citing the following benefits:

- Patients on methadone were over four times more likely to stay in treatment and had 33 percent fewer opioid-positive drug tests compared to patients treated with placebo;
- Methadone treatment significantly improves treatment outcomes alone and with counseling; long-term (beyond six months) outcomes are better for patients receiving methadone, regardless of counseling received;
- Buprenorphine treatment significantly decreased the number of opioid-positive drug tests; multiple studies found a 75-80 percent reduction in the number of patients testing positive for opioid use;
- Methadone and buprenorphine are equally effective at reducing opioid use.

Source: *What Science tells us About Opioid Abuse and Addiction*

Significant Increases in Drug Overdose Deaths Involving Heroin (2014-2015)



Georgia was ranked 6th in the nation for heroin-related death rates in 2015.

Heroin overdose death is on the rise throughout Georgia.

How do we know? One horrifying measure is the increase in death by heroin overdose. Since 1990, the number of Americans dying from a drug overdose is up by more than 500 percent. In 2015, Georgia was ranked 6th in the nation for heroin-related death rates - up 37.5 percent from 2014.

Betty Wright of New Horizons MAT in Rome says, "We have a lot of drug activity, especially IV drug use (IDU). I've lived in Rome all of my life; I've never seen it like this." At MAT clinics, a large percentage of clients have injected drugs. If they relapse - a common symptom for individuals with a substance use diagnosis - many resume IDU. Anyone who shares needles or other injection equipment runs the risk of exposure to blood borne viruses like HIV and hepatitis C (HCV). The issue has become a public health epidemic with devastating consequences like the 2015 HIV / HCV outbreak in southern Indiana.