

Finding Beauty in the North GA Mtns.

“Many people don’t understand that an opioid use disorder is a treatable medical condition, not a failure of character.” - Jeanetta Loudermilk

At Pittard Clinic in Toccoa, Georgia, Jeanette Loudermilk measures success in two ways. She estimates that 50 – 60% of their patients are stabilized. “But when a patient with track marks all over their arms comes in after three months and they don’t have track marks, that’s a success too,” says Jeanette.

The Pittard Clinic is a medication assisted treatment (MAT) provider whose mission is to stabilize individuals who have an opiate use disorder so that they can function – work, raise a family. “The counselors, nurses, and front office staff work as a team to provide exceptional service to our clients,” says Jeanette. The clinic offers patients an array of services from counseling and group therapy to primary medical care and treatment for hepatitis C. In the wake of the opioid epidemic more people are recognizing that MAT is a highly effective intervention for clients grappling with an opioid use disorder.

In the Cherokee language, Toccoa means “beautiful.” With a population of less than 9,000, Toccoa is a small, pretty town tucked in the north Georgia mountains. But for Jeanette, the natural beauty of the area is at odds with the devastation from the opioid epidemic that she sees daily. Compounding the loss and stigma associated with substance use is a lack of understanding about MAT. Pittard’s medical director, Carl Smith, MD, works hard to educate ER and primary doctors, law enforcement and court officials about the efficacy of MAT in treating patients with an opioid use disorder. But it takes time.



Jeanette Loudermilk, The Pittard Clinic, Toccoa, Georgia

“We are working to build a partnership with DFACS; we are trying to educate them about the difference between medication assisted treatment and substance abuse,” says Jeanette. “They don’t always realize that for people struggling with an opiate use disorder, abstinence isn’t the only – or necessarily even the best – treatment.”

“Many people don’t understand that an opioid use disorder is a treatable medical condition, not a failure of character.” When patients begin treatment, they step out of a life of unimaginable chaos into a system structured to allow them to reclaim their lives, one step at a time. At first, they come to the clinic every day to get their medication. As they meet the requirements – regular drug screens, therapy, resolution of any outstanding legal issues – they earn the right to come in for their doses less frequently. And their lives begin to improve.

“We get to celebrate with them when they find a job and start working or they get their children back from DFACS. I guess that’s the real beauty – seeing people change for the better.” ■