Subutex vs Suboxone

Charles Schaubberger, MD, FACOG, FASAM
July 26, 2022
No Conflicts of Interest to Report
Subutex vs Suboxone

For this talk, this is *code* for mono-product vs bi-product. I provide no endorsement of any specific brand.
Brief History of Buprenorphine

• Developed in the 1970s as a safer alternative to morphine for treatment of pain

• DATA 2000 Act allowed providers to prescribe it for addiction care as an alternative to methadone, but required an individual waiver to prescribe

• Treatment of choice for opioid-dependent women during pregnancy (ACOG, 2017). Higher birthweight, larger head circumferences, less preterm birth, and less neonatal withdrawal when compared to methadone
How Does Buprenorphine Work

• Long-acting, high-affinity partial agonist at the mu-opioid receptor
• Prevents withdrawal and craving and “stabilizes opioid receptors”
• Blocks other opioids from binding
• As a partial agonist, it has a smaller effect, a ceiling, a low overdose risk, and no intoxication in the opioid dependent
• 16 mg will cover approximately 80% of opioid receptors
Naloxone

• Opioid antagonist
• Poor oral or sublingual absorption
• High first-pass hepatic metabolism
• No human studies on teratogenicity, but animal studies are negative
• No effect on sublingual use of buprenorphine, but blocks intravenous or intranasal abuse of buprenorphine
• Added to buprenorphine to decrease the risk of abuse and diversion
Subutex

• Was the only product on the market when it was first used in pregnancy
• Urged prescription due to the concern about the unknown risk of naloxone crossing the placenta. Rapid clearing by the liver makes this transfer very minimal (Weigand et al 2016)
• Recommendation persists that patients be transferred to Subutex during pregnancy
• Poor availability of product, increased costs, patient resistance
• Buprenorphine-products are the #1 diverted opioid. In many countries, the monoprocess is strictly regulated and often unavailable
Suboxone

• The rationale for the use of the bi-product holds in pregnancy
• Most of the original studies were done with Subutex.
• Link, et al systematic review and meta-analysis (2020). Similar pregnancy outcomes*
• Alas, the gold-standard, randomized controlled trial remains elusive