An Oifig Náisiúnta don Chuimsiú Sóisialta
Lána an Mhuilinn,
Baile Pharma,
Baile Átha Cliath 20,
D20 KH63
Tel: 01 620 1822

National Social Inclusion Office
Mill Lane,
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Dublin 20,
D20 KH63
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18th April 2018

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

Re: PQ 16989/18
To ask the Minister for Health the HSE's policy in relation to Suboxone take away doses; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

Suboxone is the trade name for a buprenorphine/naloxone combination medication used in the treatment of Opioid dependence and has a similar function to methadone. The HSE's policy in relation to take home medication of Opioid Substitution Treatment(OST) is clearly outlined in the HSE 'Clinical Guidelines for Opioid Substitution Treatment'. This states that after the induction and stabilisation phase of treatment with OST, take home medication can be provided to individuals as a form of Contingency Management (CM) once clinical stability has been demonstrated. CM is used to modify a person's drug use or to increase health promoting behaviours. CM would normally be provided as part of a structured care or treatment plan in combination with other interventions provided by the keyworker/care-team/ clinician. This approach has been identified in the NICE guidelines as having the strongest scientific evidence base for the most effective outcomes. CM, in the form of take-home OST medication, is balanced against the need to have safe oversight of the use of OST medicine and the need to be aware of community safety from diversion of methadone or buprenorphine.

On balance, initiating treatment with supervised dosing, assessing response to treatment, and subsequently allowing unsupervised doses to patients who demonstrate stability appears to substantially reduce diversion, does not diminish efficacy and is supported by patient groups (WHO, 2009). The risk of diversion of prescribed OST to the black market should be considered before take away doses are provided.

Potential risks to children of ingesting OST medication and the availability of safe storage should also be considered. The patient should be advised of safe storage requirements by both the prescribing doctor and dispensing pharmacist.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Eamon Keenan
National Clinical Lead-Addiction Services