

Corresponding Responsibility Considerations for Dispensing Buprenorphine

State and Federal law establish that pharmacists share a corresponding responsibility with prescribers to ensure controlled substances are dispensed solely for a legitimate medical purpose and within the bounds of professional practice. Because buprenorphine is most often prescribed for the treatment of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), its therapeutic intent should be a key part of the pharmacist's evaluation. Pharmacists are legally required to verify the legitimacy of the prescriber and the appropriateness of the prescription. This assessment should reflect buprenorphine's established role in preventing withdrawal, reducing cravings, supporting long-term recovery, and lowering rates of overdose, emergency department visits, hospitalizations and death.

Research consistently shows that access to buprenorphine is protective. Given the clinically significant distinctions in buprenorphine's use, pharmacists are obligated to balance vigilance for potential concerns with an understanding that delaying or denying buprenorphine can expose patients with OUD to serious harm.

Pharmacists should also be aware that commonly cited indicators of potentially fraudulent controlled substance prescriptions do not always translate well to buprenorphine used for OUD treatment. Long travel distances, telehealth prescribing, cash payment, early refills, or use of multiple pharmacies often reflect limited availability of prescribers or pharmacies, particularly in rural or underserved areas, rather than misuse or diversion. Because interruptions in buprenorphine therapy can increase the risk of relapse and overdose, pharmacists are encouraged to take these access challenges into account, communicate with prescribers when questions arise, and support continuity of care when prescriptions are determined to be legitimate.

Additional resources are available to assist pharmacists in identifying practice considerations, including ["The Pharmacy Access to Resources and Medication](#)

for Opioid Use Disorder (PhARM-OUD) Guideline, A Joint Consensus Practice
Guideline from the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy and the
National Community Pharmacists Association."

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