November Pharmacy Newsletter

mercy care

NOVEMBER IS GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE OUT MONTH

Tobacco use remains one of the leading preventable causes of disease and death worldwide. Smoking increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and many other serious illnesses. The good news is that quitting smoking can rapidly improve health, regardless of how long a person has smoked. Evidence shows that combining behavioral support with medication significantly improves long-term quit rates.

Nicotine is a highly addictive substance that acts on nicotinic acetylcholine receptors in the brain, stimulating dopamine release and reinforcing tobacco use. Withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, and cravings often make quitting challenging. Because tobacco dependence is a chronic medical condition, many individuals require multiple quit attempts before achieving long-term success.

MEDICATIONS USED TO QUIT SMOKING

Research consistently demonstrates that pharmacotherapy can substantially improve smoking cessation outcomes when combined with counseling and support.

1. Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)-NRT works by providing controlled doses of nicotine without the harmful chemicals found in tobacco smoke.

Available forms:

- Nicotine patch
- Gum
- Lozenge
- Inhaler
- Nasal spray

Benefits:

- Reduces withdrawal symptoms
- Helps manage cravings
- Can be used alone or in combination (for example, a patch plus gum or lozenge)

2. Varenicline (Chantix)-Varenicline partially stimulates nicotine receptors while blocking nicotine from cigarettes.

Benefits:

- Reduces cravings
- Decreases the rewarding effects of smoking
- Consistently demonstrates among the highest smoking cessation success rates in clinical studies.

3. Bupropion SR (Zyban)-Originally developed as an antidepressant, bupropion helps reduce nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Benefits:

- May be helpful for individuals concerned about post-cessation weight gain
- Can be used alone or with NRT in selected patients

COVERED PRODUCTS PER AHCCCS POLICY: TOBACCO CESSATION PRODUCTS

The members must enroll with the Arizona Smokers' Helpline (ASH Line) by calling Arizona Smokers Helpline 1-800-556-6222 or visiting www.ashline.org.

The maximum supply a member may receive of a tobacco cessation product is a 12-week supply in a six-month time period. The six-month period begins on the date the pharmacy fills the first tobacco cessation product.

Prior Authorization (PA) is required for:
1. Members under the age of 18 years old.
2. Brand name medications when a generic product is available.
3. Bupropion 24 hour/Wellbutrin XL.

Coverage is not authorized for:
1. Non-Title XIX members.
2. Indications other than as an aid for tobacco cessation.
3. Doses greater than the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maximum allowable.
4. Combination treatment with more than one of the above agents.
5. Specific drug-disease condition contraindications.

ADDICTION RECOVERY AND SMOKING CESSATION: A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

Smoking rates are significantly higher among individuals recovering from alcohol and substance use disorders. Historically, tobacco use was often overlooked during addiction treatment. However, research now shows that addressing tobacco dependence during recovery does not jeopardize sobriety and may actually improve long-term recovery outcomes.

Benefits of treating tobacco use during recovery include:
- Improved cardiovascular and respiratory health
- Better quality of life
- Reduced overall mortality
- Enhanced confidence in managing addictive behaviors
- Support for broader recovery goals

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL RECOVERY

Behavioral Counseling
Counseling helps individuals:
- Identify smoking triggers
- Develop coping skills
- Create quit plans
- Prevent relapse

Both individual and group counseling have been shown to improve quit rates.

Digital Support Tools
Evidence supports the use of:

- Text-message programs
- Smartphone applications
- Telephone quit lines
- Online support communities

These tools can increase engagement and provide support during difficult periods.

Build a Recovery Network
Successful quitting is often easier with support from:

- Healthcare professionals
- Family members
- Friends
- Recovery groups
- Tobacco cessation programs

Smoking cessation is a journey, not a single event. Encourage members to set a quit date and remove cigarettes, vaping products, and tobacco products from their environments. Combining evidence-based medications, behavioral support, and addiction recovery resources can significantly increase the likelihood of long-term success. Every quit attempt is a step toward better health, greater freedom from addiction, and improved quality of life.

References:

1. Harris E. Systematic Review Finds the Most Effective Smoking Cessation Aids. JAMA. 2023.
2. World Health Organization. WHO Clinical Treatment Guideline for Tobacco Cessation in Adults. 2024.
3. Pajai DD, et al. Pharmacotherapy in Tobacco Cessation: A Narrative Review. Cureus. 2023.
4. Effective smoking cessation interventions among adults: systematic review of reviews. Systematic Reviews. 2024.
5. https://www.azahcccs.gov/shared/Downloads/MedicalPolicyManual/300/Exhibit300-1.pdf

PREFERRED DRUG LIST UPDATES CAN BE FOUND HERE:

ACC-RBHA, DD, ALTCS and DCS CHP	Behavioral Health (Non-Title 19/21)

** Drugs that are not on the formulary will require a PA (prior authorization) request to be submitted**

Reminder for quicker determinations of a Prior Authorization use the ePA link for Our Providers: Please click here to initiate an electronic prior authorization (ePA) request.

This newsletter is brought to you by the Mercy Care Pharmacy Team. For questions, please email Fanny A Musto (MustoF@mercycareaz.org), Denise Volkov (VolkovD@mercycareaz.org) or Jasmine Phillips (PhillipsJ6@aetna.com)