

Evaluating the Readiness to Discontinue: Four Questions

Timing is an important aspect of discontinuing buprenorphine. Discontinuing buprenorphine can lead to relapse if various biopsychosocial factors in their lives are unstable. Counselors should advise patients to choose a time when biopsychosocial factors that promote successful outcomes are in place. The following four questions can help counselors evaluate patients' readiness to discontinue.

- ❑ **Have previous attempts at detoxification been unsuccessful?** Patients who have a negative attitude toward maintenance treatments should be encouraged to weigh the likely prospect of resumed heroin use after stopping buprenorphine, particularly if this has happened in the past
- ❑ **Have previous attempts at detoxification have been successful?** Patients who have previously remained drug-free following detoxification may be successful again. Review with patients the reasons why they relapsed previously. Review the number of periods of abstinence. Several successes suggest several periods of relapse. Examine the length of time of the periods of abstinence.
- ❑ **Is heroin (or other illicit opiates) avoidable or unavoidable in the patient's living or working situation?** Proximity to opiates will make continued abstinence following treatment unlikely.
- ❑ **Is the patient's living situation stable or unstable?** Abstinence is not likely to be sustained without pharmacologic maintenance treatment in circumstances that are stressful, chaotic, or unstable.