



Elimination of the X-Waiver

The Issue:

Buprenorphine, a partial opioid medication, is a highly effective addiction treatment medication. It is classified as a Schedule III controlled substance under the Controlled Substances Act, meaning that the drug is highly regulated. Under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act, with very limited exceptions, clinicians could only prescribe buprenorphine if they had a specialized waiver known as the “X-waiver.” Administering buprenorphine presents opportunity to combat the opioid crisis in regions with little access to addiction treatment. For example, France deregulated buprenorphine in 1995 and saw a 79% decrease in overdose deaths within four years.

SHM Advocacy Efforts:

- SHM has been an active and vocal supporter of the expanding buprenorphine prescribing privileges. Notably, SHM has supported the elimination of the “X-waiver.”

Expanded Buprenorphine Prescribing Rules:

On January 15th, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), recognizing the barriers to treating opioid use disorder (OUD), amended practice guidelines to **exempt** physicians from needing the X-Waiver certification to treat OUD using buprenorphine. Essentially, the X-Waiver has been eliminated. The new practice guidelines for buprenorphine come with certain specific parameters:

- The exemption is limited to physicians only who possess a valid DEA registration, and can only be used to treat patients in states in which they are licensed to practice medicine.
- It enables physicians to prescribe OUD treatment drugs that required the X-waiver, like buprenorphine, not methadone.
- Physicians using the exemption are limited to treating no more than 30 patients, however hospital-based physicians (such as hospitalists and ED physicians) are not subject to this limit.
- Prescriptions must have an “X” placed on it and clearly indicate that the prescription is for treating OUD, along with physicians maintaining patient charts.

The official notice and practice guidelines from HHS can be found here:

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/mat-physician-practice-guidelines.pdf>