



Brigham and Women's Hospital

Founding Member, Mass General Brigham

Management of Substance Use Disorders in the Medical Setting

David B. Hathaway, MD

Board Certified Psychiatrist & Addiction Psychiatrist

Clinical Lead for Addictions in Consult-Liaison Psychiatry

Brigham & Women's Hospital | Mass General Brigham Department of Psychiatry

Disclosures

No relevant disclosures



Learning Objectives

By the end of this talk, the audience will:

Recognize and manage **alcohol withdrawal** and initiate evidence-based pharmacotherapy to support recovery.

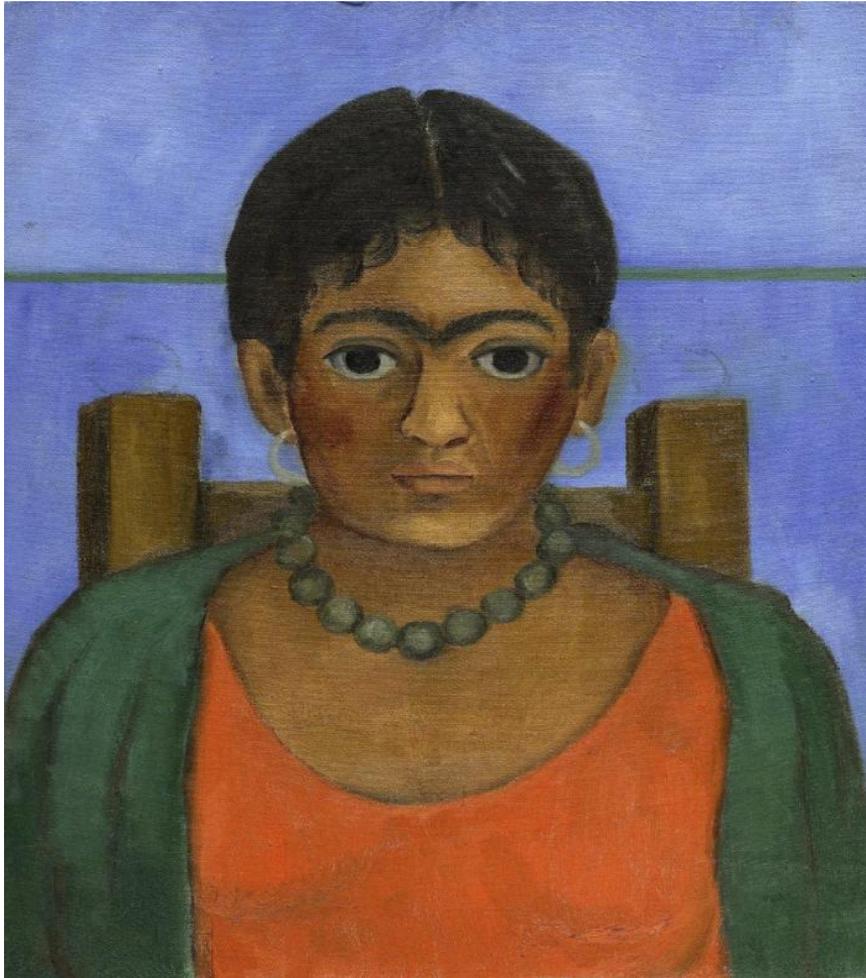
Diagnose opioid use disorder and implement guideline-based **opioid agonist therapy**, and harm reduction strategies.



Learning Objective #1

Recognize and manage **alcohol withdrawal** and initiate evidence-based pharmacotherapy to support recovery.





*"I tried to drown my sorrows in alcohol,
but [they] learned how to swim."
(Frida Kahlo)*

A 38-year-old woman arrives with a two-week history of daily tension-type headaches—dull, band-like pressure that worsens by evening and only partially responds to over-the-counter analgesics, and she recently received a short course of narcotic analgesics when offered for breakthrough pain. Past records are notable for her reporting a long-standing pattern of heavy weekend drinking (last AUDIT-C: 6), several recent ED visits for intoxication followed by her no-showing to outpatient PCP follow up appointments. She lives with her mother and 8-year-daughter, works intermittently as a retail manager. Her physical exam is unremarkable. Headache prophylaxis with low-dose amitriptyline is initiated, sleep hygiene is reviewed, but she declines to be referred to addiction services after discharge.

**hypothetical case vignette for teaching purposes*



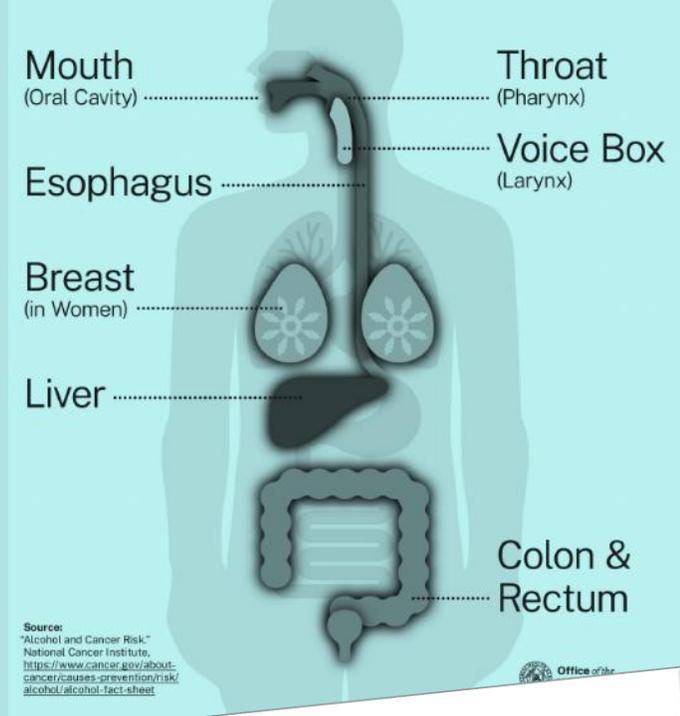
178,000

Number of deaths attributable to alcohol in 2021
(CDC)



“Alcohol Consumption is the Third Leading Preventable Cause of Cancer in the [US].”

– United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy (January 3, 2025)



The New York Times
Surgeon General Calls for Cancer Warnings on Alcohol

Dr. Vivek Murthy's report cites studies linking alcoholic beverages to at least seven malignancies, including breast cancer. But to add warning labels, Congress would have to act.



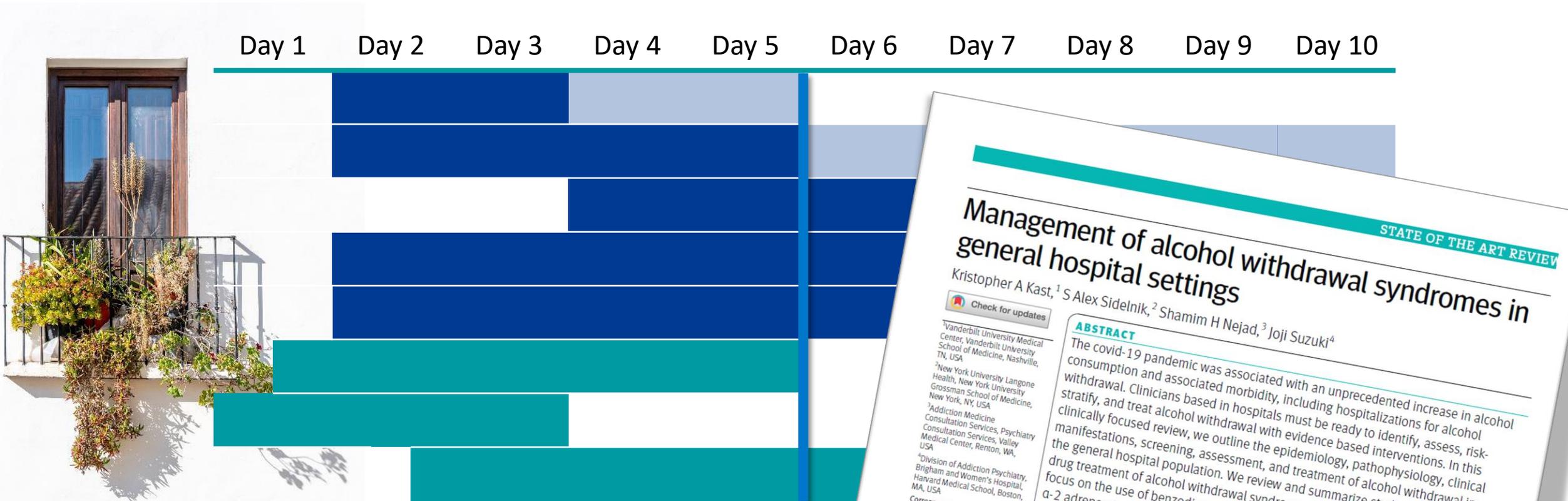
Case 1

"I tried to drown my sorrows in alcohol, but the bastards learned how to swim."

- Frida Kahlo



Hospitalization is a window of “iatrogenic opportunity,” interrupting alcohol use for an average of 5.9 days



Kast KA, Sidelnik SA, Nejad SH, Suzuki J. Management of alcohol withdrawal syndromes in general hospital settings. *BMJ*. 2025;388:e080461. Published 2025 Jan 8. doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-080461 (used as a source throughout this presentation), citing <https://data.oecd.org/healthcare/length-of-hospital-stay.htm#indicator-chart>

STATE OF THE ART REVIEW

Management of alcohol withdrawal syndromes in general hospital settings

Kristopher A Kast,¹ S Alex Sidelnik,² Shamim H Nejad,³ Joji Suzuki⁴

[Check for updates](#)

ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic was associated with an unprecedented increase in alcohol consumption and associated morbidity, including hospitalizations for alcohol withdrawal. Clinicians based in hospitals must be ready to identify, assess, risk-stratify, and treat alcohol withdrawal with evidence based interventions. In this clinically focused review, we outline the epidemiology, pathophysiology, clinical manifestations, screening, assessment, and treatment of alcohol withdrawal in the general hospital population. We review and summarize studies addressing the drug treatment of alcohol withdrawal syndromes in inpatient populations, with a focus on the use of benzodiazepine drugs, phenobarbital, antiseizure drugs, and severe withdrawal syndromes resistant to benzodiazepine drugs, and treatment protocol variations—including non-symptom-triggered and benzodiazepine-sparing protocols. We identify key areas for research including identification of populations who will benefit from non-benzodiazepine strategies, more individualized risk stratification approaches to guide treatment, and greater inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities in future studies.

¹Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN, USA
²New York University Langone Health, New York University Grossman School of Medicine, New York, NY, USA
³Addiction Medicine Consultation Services, Psychiatry Medical Center, Renton, WA, USA
⁴Division of Addiction Psychiatry, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA

Correspondence to: K Kast
kristopher.a.kast@vumc.org
Cite this as: *BMJ* 2025;388:e080461
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2024-080461>

Series explanation: State of the Art Reviews are commissioned on the basis of their relevance to academics and specialists in the US and internationally. For this reason they are written



Alcohol Use Disorder

DSM-5-TR

Diagnostic Criteria

2 = mild
 4 = moderate
 6 = severe

DSM 5 Substance Use Disorder Diagnostic Criteria

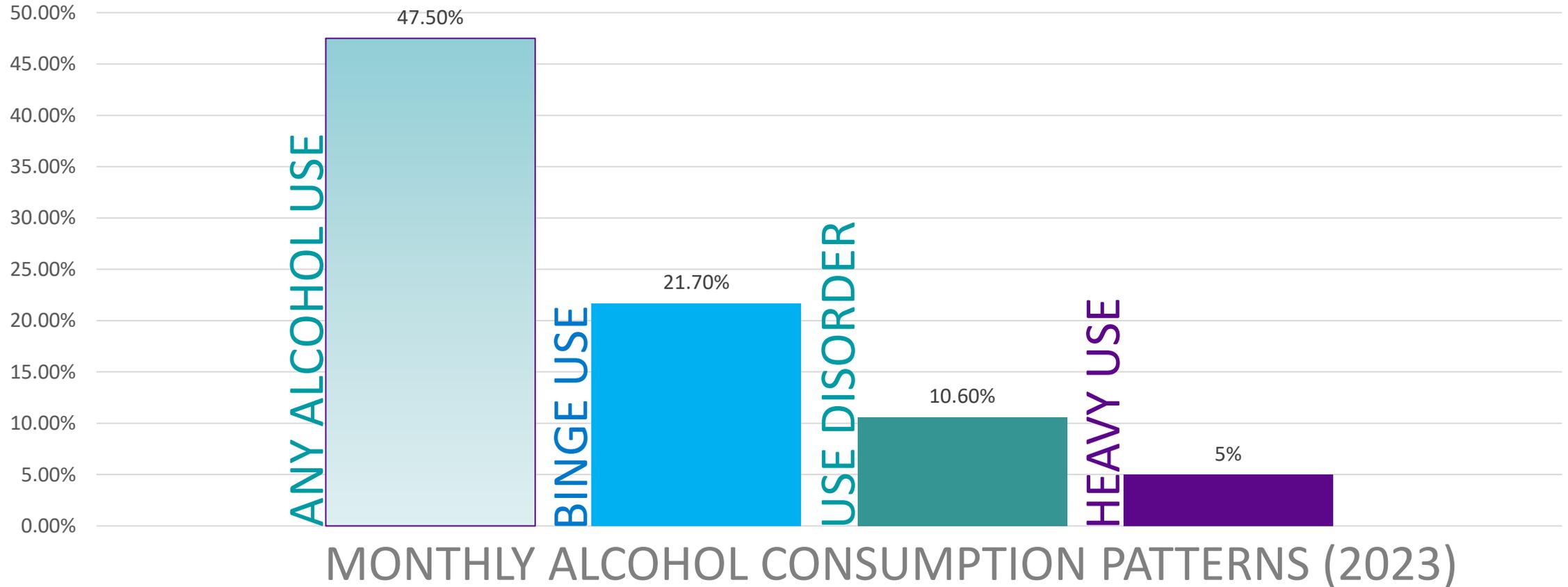
A problematic pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least **two** of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

	Alcohol	Opioid	Cocaine	Marijuana
1. Substance is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended .				
2. There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control substance use.				
3. A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain substance, use substance , or recover from its effects .				
4. Craving , or a strong desire or urge to use substance.				
5. Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home.				
6. Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of substance.				
7. Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of substance use.				
8. Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous .				
9. Substance use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by substance.				
10. Tolerance , as defined by either of the following: - A need for markedly increased amounts of substance to achieve intoxication or desired effect. - A markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of substance.				
11. Withdrawal , as manifested by either of the following: - The characteristic withdrawal syndrome for substance (refer to Criteria A and B of the criteria set for substance withdrawal, pp. 499–500). - Substance (or a closely related substance, such as a benzodiazepine) is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.				
<i>Meets Diagnostic Criteria? Severity?</i>				

Source: DSM-5



15 to 50% of persons who have an alcohol use disorder or drink heavily will develop **symptoms** of alcohol withdrawal

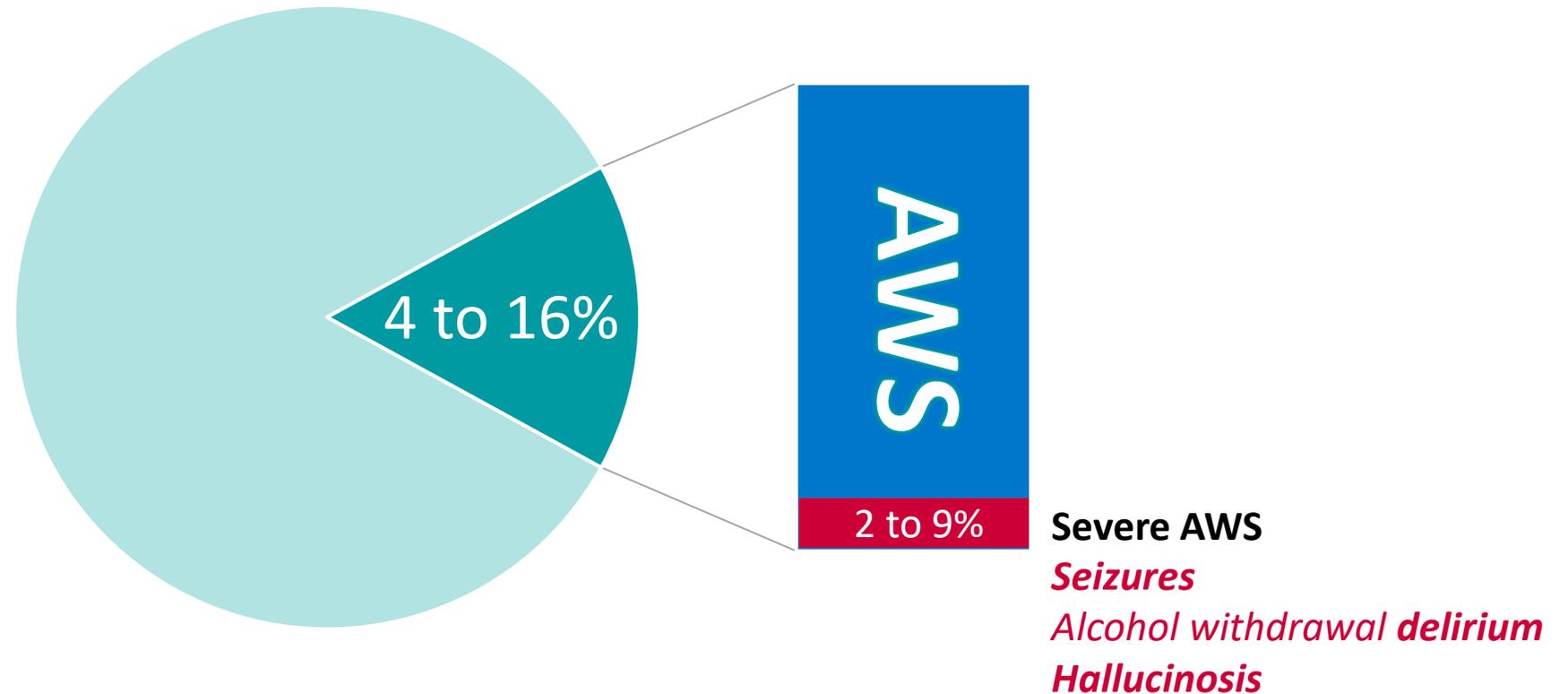


<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35275407/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15706737/>



Among all hospital admissions, **approximately 1 in 10** entail an alcohol withdrawal syndrome (AWS)

Hospital Admissions Involving an Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome

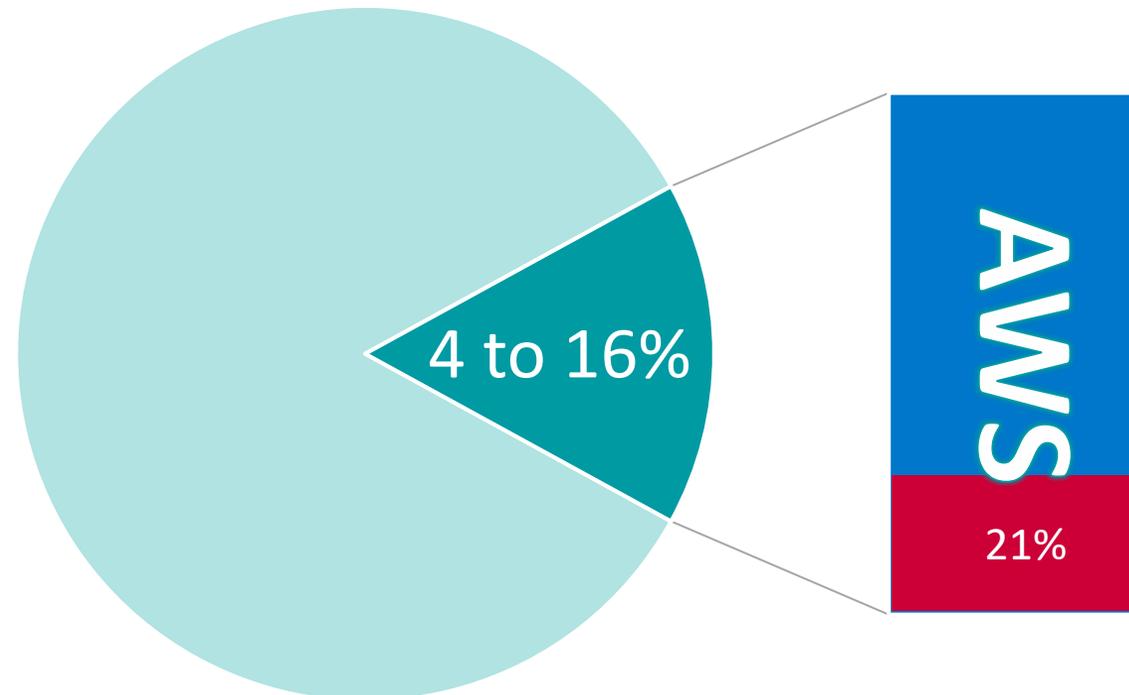


<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31609866/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27586815/>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8522287/>



Among all hospital admissions, **approximately 1 in 10** entail an alcohol withdrawal syndrome (AWS)

Hospital Admissions Involving an Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome



Severe AWS in the ICU

Seizures

Alcohol withdrawal delirium

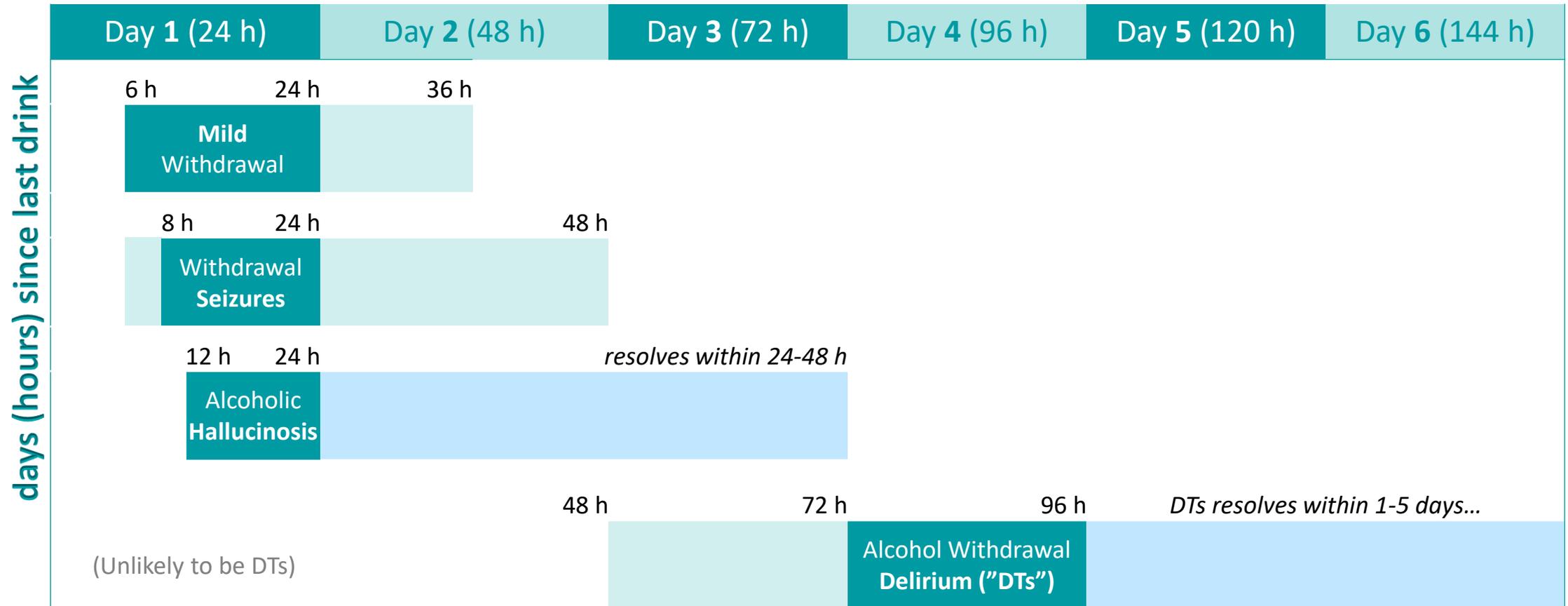
(higher morbidity, 1-8% mortality)

Hallucinosis

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31609866/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27586815/>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8522287/>



Hospitalization is a window of “iatrogenic opportunity,” interrupting alcohol use for an average of 5.9 days





DSM-5-TR Alcohol Withdrawal

Two (or more) of the following, developing within several hours to a few days after the cessation of (or reduction in) [heavy & prolonged] alcohol use....



autonomic hyperactivity



increased hand tremor



insomnia



nausea or vomiting



transient VH, TH, AH or illusions



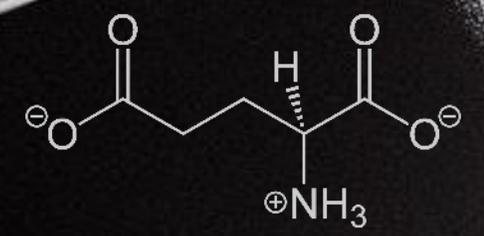
psychomotor agitation



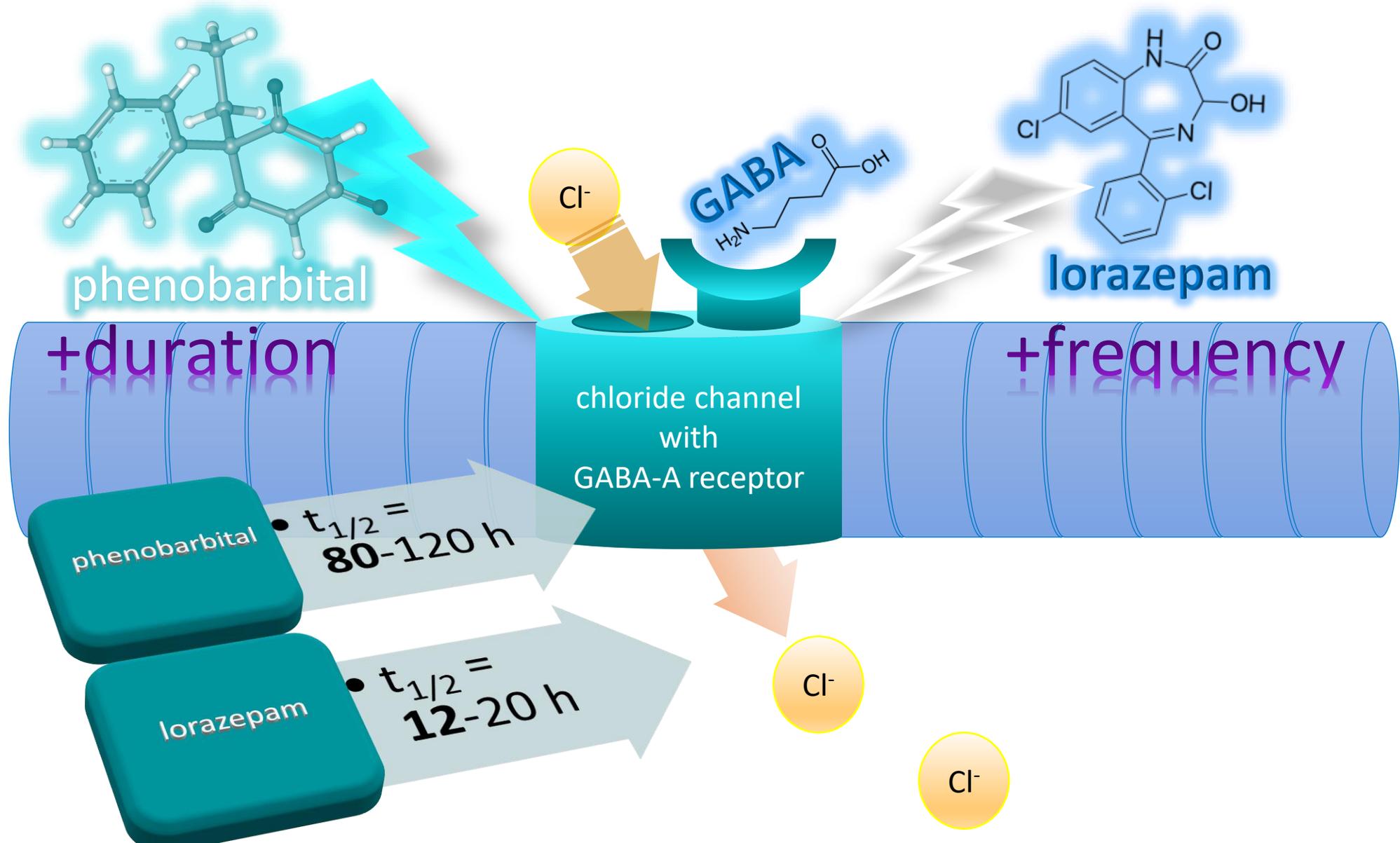
anxiety



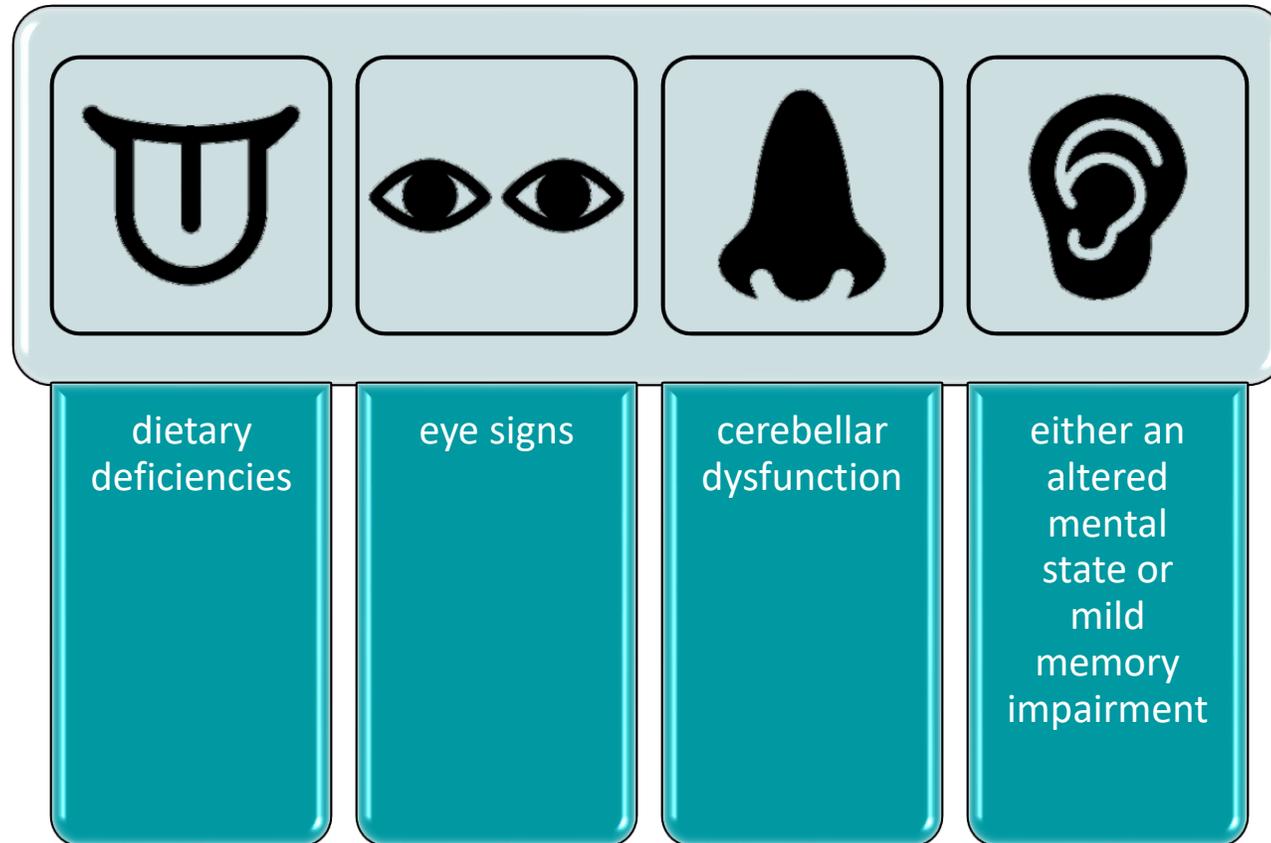
generalized tonic-clonic seizures



NMDA



Caine Criteria

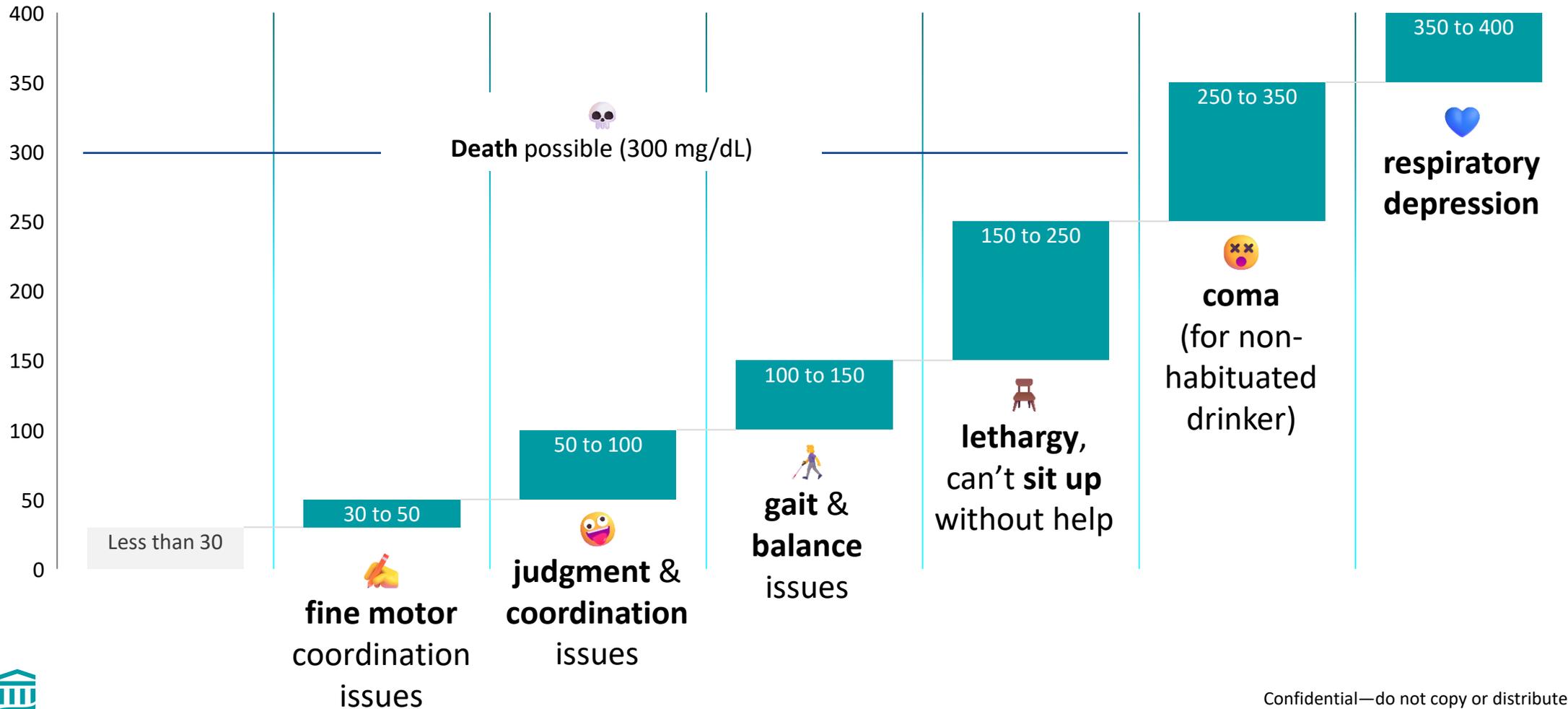


2+ → Caine-Positive

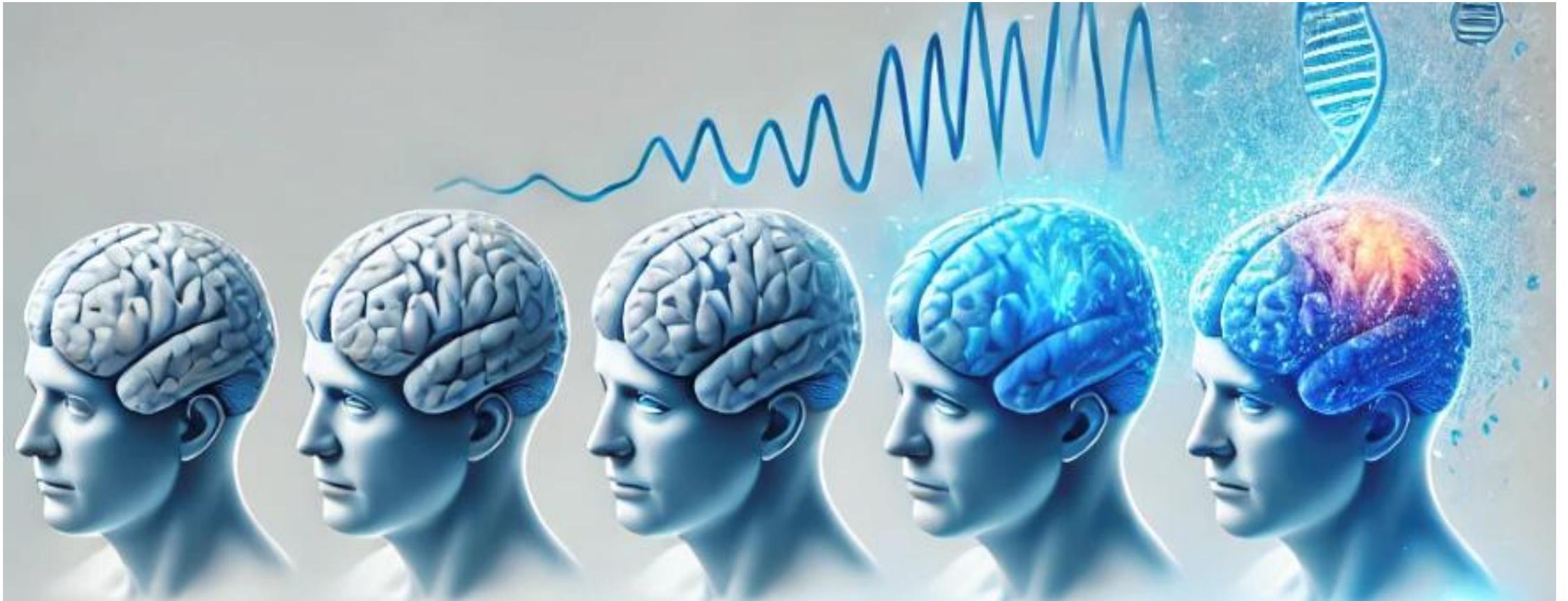


Effects of intoxication

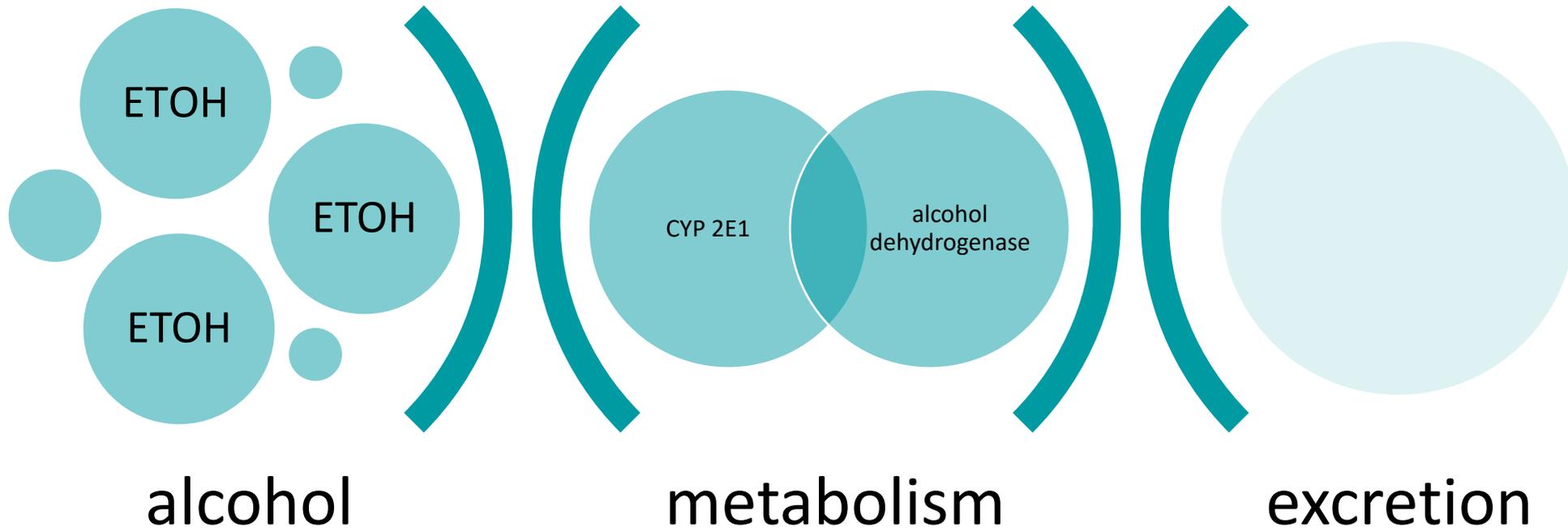
A dose-response curve for alcohol



Kindling (sensitization): if at first you don't withdraw...
what doesn't kill you may make you more vulnerable



Alcohol is generally metabolized at a fixed rate:
~ 20 mg/dL per hour (range 8-32)



<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1940231/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16912820/>
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23101976/>



Box 1: Potential utility of combined biomarker testing in alcohol withdrawal risk

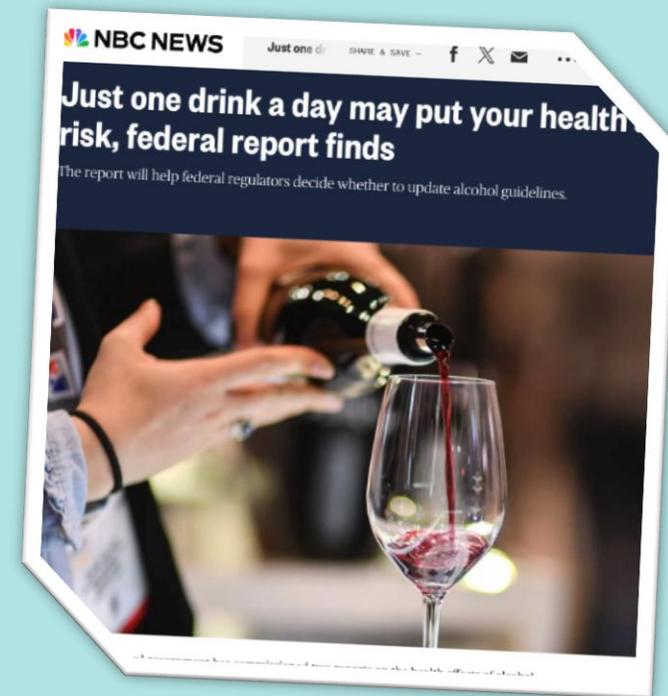
Combining phosphatidylethanol (PEth) and ethylglucuronide (EtG) testing for an individual patient could helpfully inform the management of patients in general hospitals with alcohol withdrawal syndromes. Elevated PEth and EtG values confirm recent alcohol consumption, while negative PEth and EtG values suggest very little or potentially no alcohol use in the past several weeks, a finding which could be particularly helpful in determining the need to monitor for and treat alcohol withdrawal syndromes where self-reporting is either unreliable or unavailable. Negative PEth and EtG values might remove the risk for alcohol withdrawal syndromes, although further study is needed to demonstrate this in clinical populations.

	Positive PEth	Negative PEth
Positive EtG	At risk for AWS, further risk stratification needed to provide appropriate monitoring and treatment.	Possible recent alcohol use or exposure with previous low/no alcohol use.
Negative EtG	Possible recent 3-5 day period of alcohol abstinence with previous alcohol use.	Likely low risk for AWS, might not require symptom monitoring or treatment.

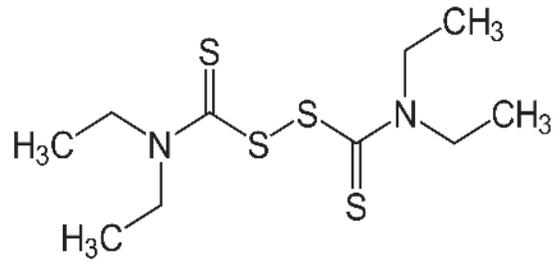


"I got sober. I stopped killing myself with alcohol. I began to think: 'Wait a minute, if I can stop doing this, what are the possibilities?"

- Craig Ferguson

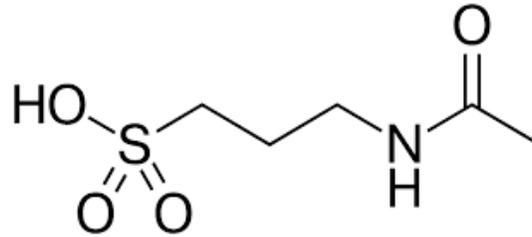


FDA-approved medications for the treatment of alcohol use disorder (mAUD)



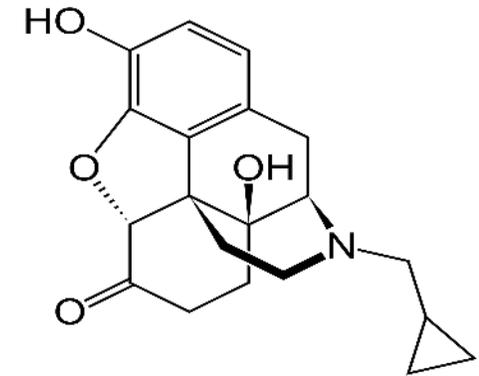
Disulfiram
[Antabuse]

1951



Acamprosate
[Campral]

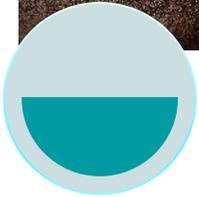
2004



Naltrexone
[Revia/Vivitrol]

1994/2006



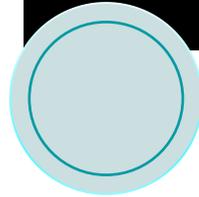


*To Drink **Less?***

Naltrexone

[Gabapentin?]

[Semaglutide?]



*To Drink **Nothing?***

Acamprosate

Disulfiram

[GLP-1s?]

What is the
goal of the
treatment?



Hospital admissions for alcohol withdrawal increased 1.8x early in the COVID-19 pandemic



JAMA Network | **Open**



Research Letter | Substance Use and Addiction

Alcohol Withdrawal Rates in Hospitalized Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ram A. Sharma, MD; Keshab Subedi, MS, MSc; Bayo M. Gbadebo, MBA; Beverly Wilson, MS; Claudine Jurkowitz, MD, MPH; Terry Horton, MD

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is disrupting communities across the globe, causing physical, mental, and financial distress.¹ Economic crises have been associated with increased alcohol consumption.² Necessary public health measures may exacerbate isolation and stress, negatively impacting those who are at risk for harmful alcohol use. Increased alcohol use has been documented in the US and other countries during the pandemic, and a recent study³ has identified associated consequences. Alcohol withdrawal (AW) is a potentially dangerous complication of alcohol use disorder (AUD) in up to 8% of all hospitalized patients with AUD.⁴ AW has been suspected to worsen after the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders,⁵ but, to our knowledge, no objective data have been reported in the literature. We hypothesized that AW rates in hospitalized patients with AUD increased during the pandemic and conducted a cohort study at Christiana Care, a large, tertiary care hospital system in Newark, Delaware.

Author affiliations and article information are listed at the end of this article.



Learning Objective #2

Diagnose opioid use disorder and implement guideline-based **opioid agonist therapy**, and harm reduction strategies.



μ

Mu opioid
receptor

- Endorphins
- Enkephalins

κ

Kappa
opioid
receptor

- Dynorphin

δ

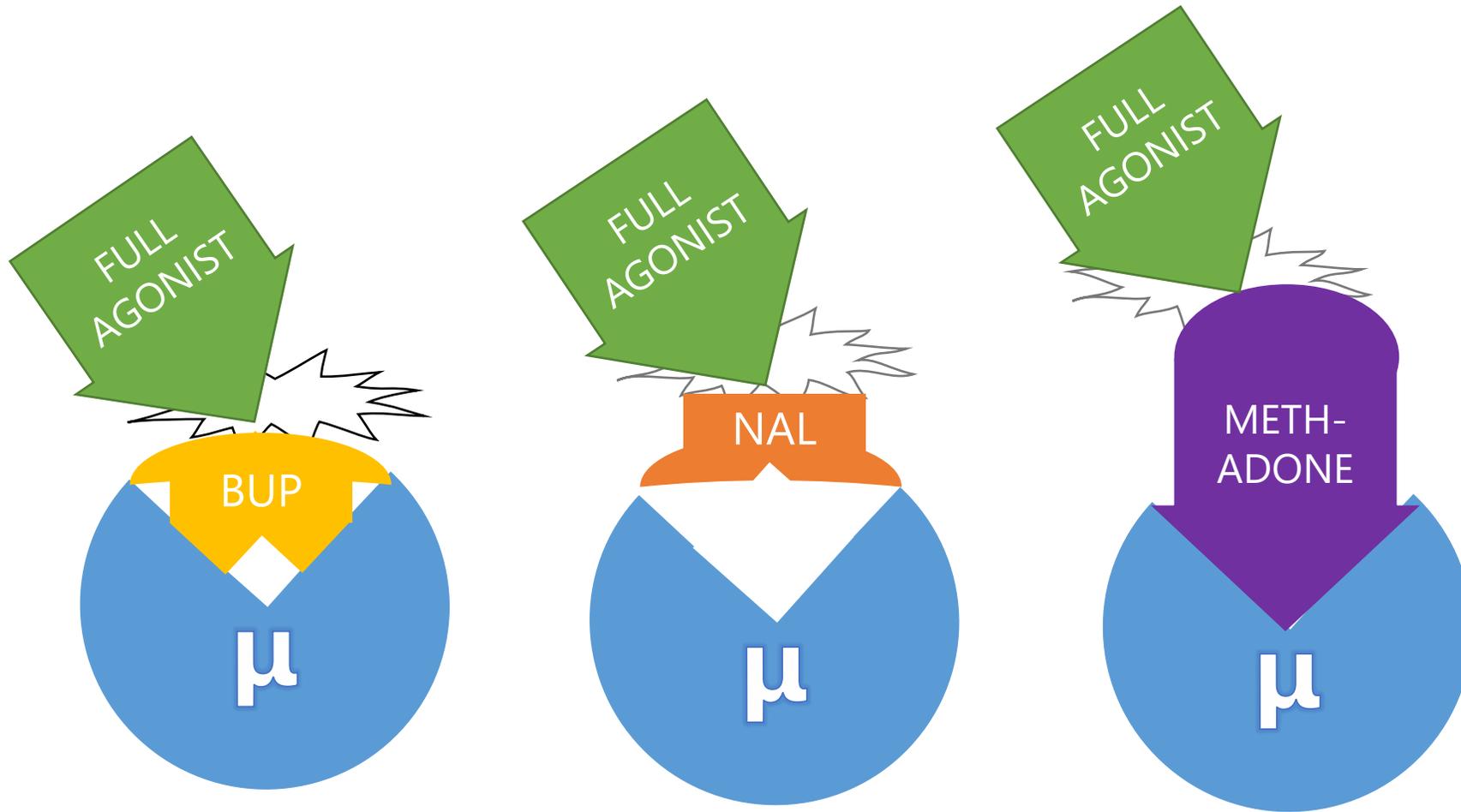
Delta
opioid
receptor

- Enkephalins

n

Nociceptin
receptor

- Nociceptin



Butrans

Brixadi
Sublocade
Probuquine

Belbuca
IV

Suboxone
Subutex
Zubsolv

*Long-acting
OUD
treatments*

*Short-acting
non-OUD
treatment*

*Short-acting
OUD
treatments*

Buprenorphine plasma concentrations (ng/mL) & buprenorphine formulations



Buprenorphine

1.1 (8mg)

1.6 (16mg)

2.3 (24mg)



Sublocade

3.21 ±

0.82

(100mg)

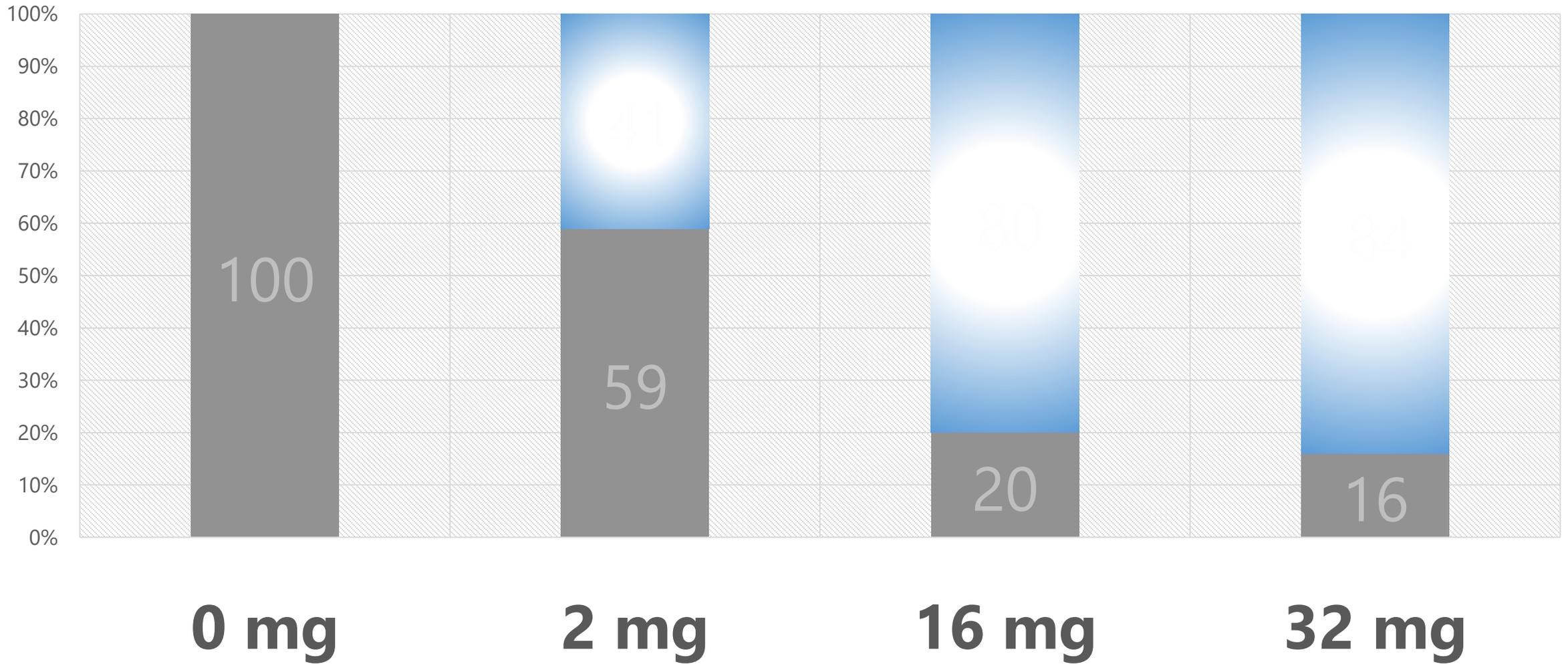
6.54 ±

3.21

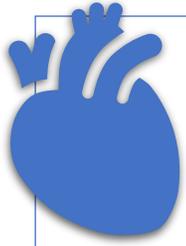
(300mg)

μ opioid receptor availability at various daily buprenorphine concentrations

- Available
- Not available



Greenwald et al. Neuropsychopharmacology. 2003;28(11):2000-9.



Hypertension/anxiety

- **Clonidine** 0.1mg PO TID
- Hold if using methadone
- Hold if hypotensive



Diarrhea

- **Loperamide** 4mg PO with first loose stool
- Then 2mg per loose stool
- Max 24 mg per day



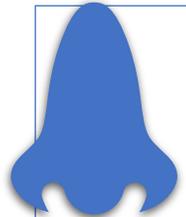
Pain

- **Ibuprofen** 600mg *or*
- Acetaminophen 650 mg PO q4-6h



Abdominal cramping

- **Dicyclomine** 20mg po q4h



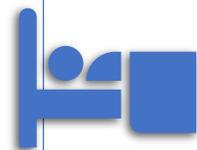
Nasal congestion

- **Diphenhydramine** 50mg PO q4h



Muscle cramps

- **Methocarbamol** 750mg PO q6h

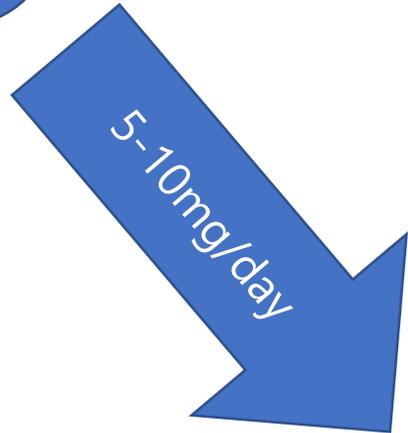


Insomnia

- **Trazodone** 50-100mg PO qHS

Methadone dose

● Typical good tx dose 80-120mg



Initial taper dose



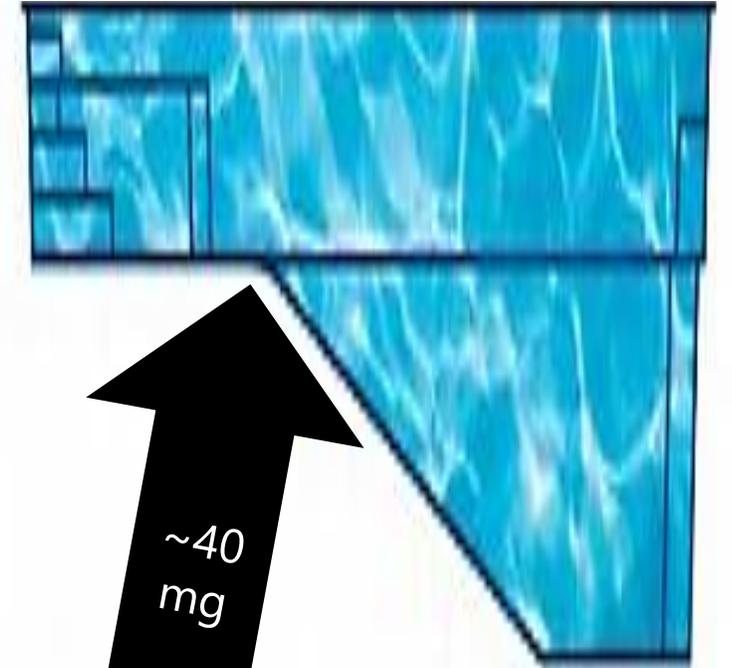
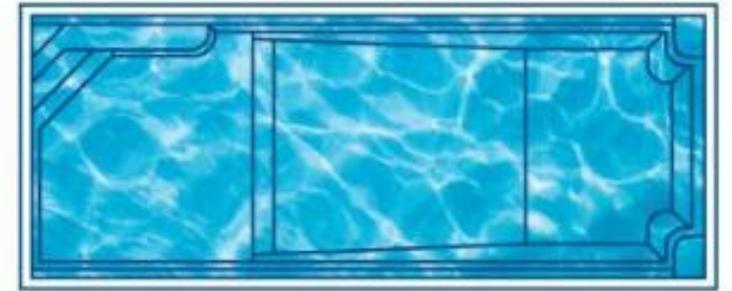
30mg

0mg

Beware of the deep end: Methadone dosing is NON-LINEAR



:
**Beyond 40mg,
limit methadone
dose increases to
10 mg per 5 days**



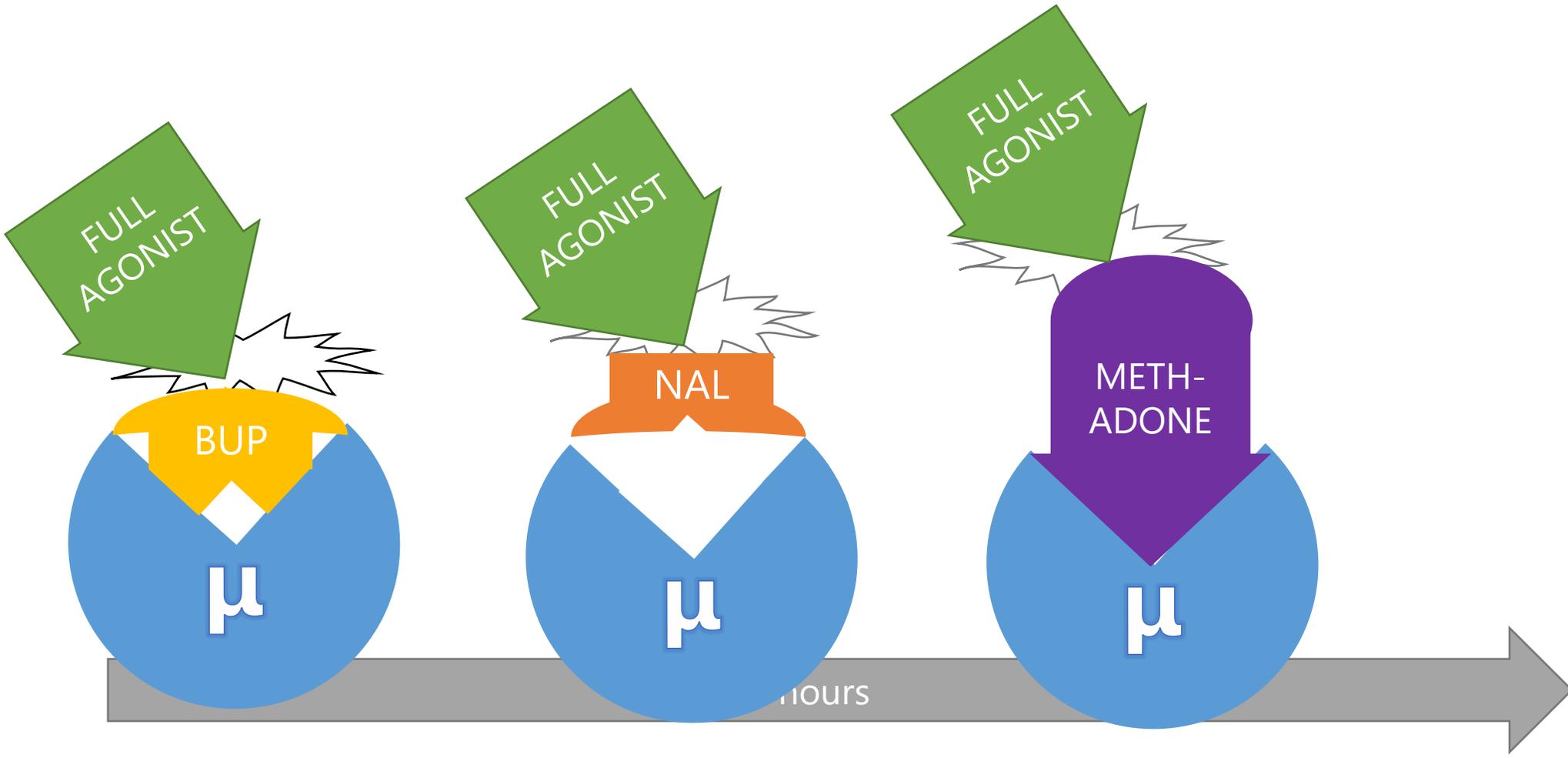


Figure 1. Recommendations for the Perioperative Management of Home Buprenorphine-Naloxone

For all patients, continue buprenorphine-naloxone throughout the perioperative period, following these steps:

Step 1: Determine total 24-hour home dose of buprenorphine (regardless of any naloxone component)

- *If home dose is ≤ 8 mg per day: **Continue home dose**¹ throughout perioperative period⁵ (do not discontinue prior to surgery); no need to proceed further in the algorithm.*
- *If home dose is > 8 mg per day (excludes obstetric patients³): Proceed to Step 2.*

Figure 1. Recommendations for the Perioperative Management of Home Buprenorphine-Naloxone

For all patients, continue buprenorphine-naloxone throughout the perioperative period, following these steps:

Step 2: Determine anticipated opioid requirements/pain after surgery⁴

<i>Anticipated post-operative opioid requirements</i>	<i>Before surgery</i>	<i>On day of surgery and throughout hospital stay</i>	<i>Preparing for discharge</i> ⁵
LOW OPIOID REQUIREMENTS ⁴	Continue home regimen ¹ (do not discontinue prior to surgery and continue home dose throughout the perioperative period) ⁵		

4. Low opioid requirements: i.e., low / mild post-operative pain or procedures where historically less than five-day courses of low-dose oxycodone or hydrocodone are prescribed.

Step 2: Determine anticipated opioid requirements/pain after surgery⁴

<i>Anticipated post-operative opioid requirements</i>	<i>Before surgery</i>	<i>On day of surgery and throughout hospital stay</i>	<i>Preparing for discharge⁵</i>
<p>MODERATE TO HIGH OPIOID REQUIREMENTS</p>	<p><u>IF HOME DOSE > 16 MG</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider titrating dose down^{1-2, 5} so that on the day before surgery, total buprenorphine dose is 16 mg daily (e.g., on day prior to procedure preferably drop to 8 mg BID vs. 16 mg as a single dose) • May consider continuing home dose if reliable continuous regional anesthesia techniques are available or based on patient and clinician preference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider decreasing to buprenorphine 8 mg per day on day of surgery (preferably 4 mg BID vs. 8 mg daily) • Anticipate need for higher opioid agonist dose requirement, similar to opioid tolerant patients maintained on methadone • Use additional opioid agonists as needed; <i>Refer to Step 3</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a post-discharge taper plan for full agonist opioids • Ideally, increase back to buprenorphine home dose at time of discharge • Transition care back to patient's outpatient buprenorphine prescriber for ongoing care with plan to increase back to original home buprenorphine dose⁵
	<p><u>IF HOME DOSE ≤ 16 MG</u> Consider continuing home dose if reliable continuous regional anesthesia techniques are available and based on patient and clinician preference; <i>Refer to Step 3</i></p>		



Orders

Clear All Orders

Opioid Withdrawal Order Set  Manage User Versions**Starting medication treatment**

The selection of medication to treat opioid withdrawal (e.g., methadone or buprenorphine) should be based on a shared decision-making process which integrates both the preferences and past experiences of patients and the clinical judgment of providers (see below).

Methadone	Buprenorphine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid in patients with <i>QT prolongation</i> May be started immediately to treat opioid withdrawal, regardless of recent exposure to fentanyl or other opioids Patients who receive a few doses of methadone to treat withdrawal <i>may still initiate buprenorphine later</i> in their hospitalization** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May restart immediately if patient took their last dose of buprenorphine in the last 72 hours Otherwise, wait for <u>COWS score</u> of 8 or higher before giving first dose** <p>**Special circumstances which may necessitate low-dose buprenorphine initiation (microdosing) or consult to addiction / psychiatry (if available):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning from methadone to buprenorphine Fentanyl exposure[†] in the last week History of precipitated withdrawal Severe pain requiring round-the-clock treatment with high-dose opioid medications

**Buprenorphine* here refers to both buprenorphine-naloxone and buprenorphine monoprodukt

[†]Assume fentanyl exposure (unless proven otherwise by laboratory toxicology results) in any patient who has injected or insufflated non-prescription opioids within the last week

▼ General

▼ Notify Responding Clinician

 Notify responding clinician

Routine Until discontinued

Low-Dose Buprenorphine Initiation (“Microdosing”)

low-dose buprenorphine initiation **indicated for patient** (see earlier)

Patient managed with **methadone maintenance treatment (MMT)** (e.g., 40+ mg of methadone for 7+ days)

Patient **NOT** managed with MMT, but may have had recent opioid exposures, such as:

- Fentanyl (iatrogenic or illicit)
- Short-acting opioids (e.g., oxycodone)
- Brief course of low dose methadone (e.g., ≤40 mg x 2-3 days)

Consider **LONG** protocol

Consider **SHORT** protocol

SHORT protocol for low-dose buprenorphine initiation

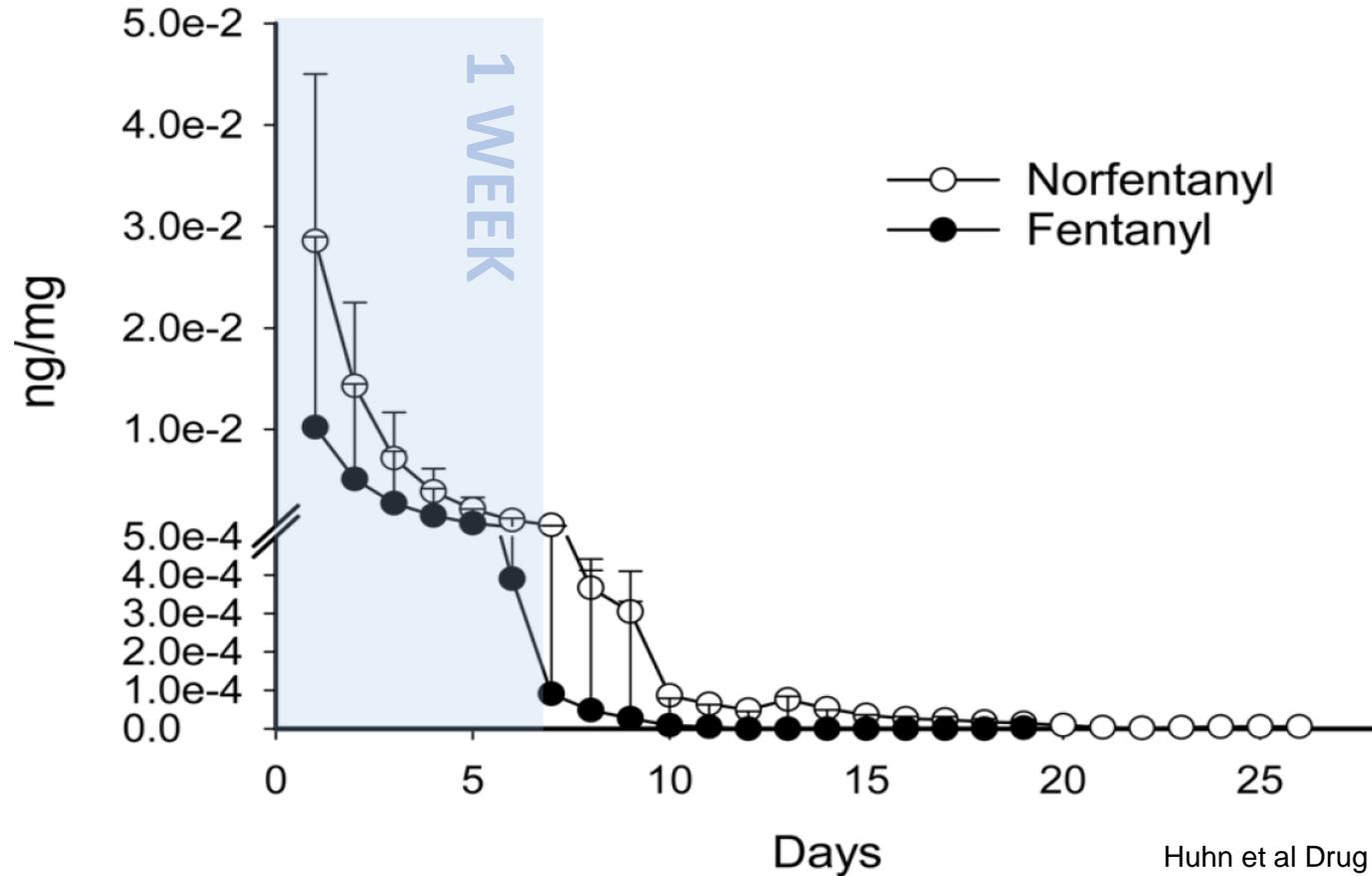
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider starting taper of full-agonist opioids if patient’s clinical condition allows (e.g., adequate pain control)* • Apply buprenorphine patch (20 mcg, or equivalent) at 8:00 AM (ideally) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the first 2 mg dose of a buprenorphine-containing product[§] around 10:00 AM** • As tolerated / if requested by patient, consider administering additional doses of buprenorphine in 2 - 4 mg increments every 2 to 4 hours,** up to a maximum total dose of 8 mg of buprenorphine on day 2† • Remove buprenorphine patch at 8:00 pm (approximately 36 hours after administration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the AM dose of a buprenorphine-containing product equal to the cumulative dose administered on Day 2** • As tolerated / if requested by patient, consider administering additional doses of buprenorphine in 2-4 mg increments every 2 to 4 hours,** up to a maximum total dose of 12 mg of buprenorphine on day 3†

LONG protocol for low-dose buprenorphine initiation

Day 1	Day 2	Days 3 - 7	Day 8
•Continue methadone	• Administer the first 2 mg dose	•Continue methadone or	•Stop methadone



Fentanyl and Norfentanyl Elimination



Huhn et al Drug Alc Dep 2020

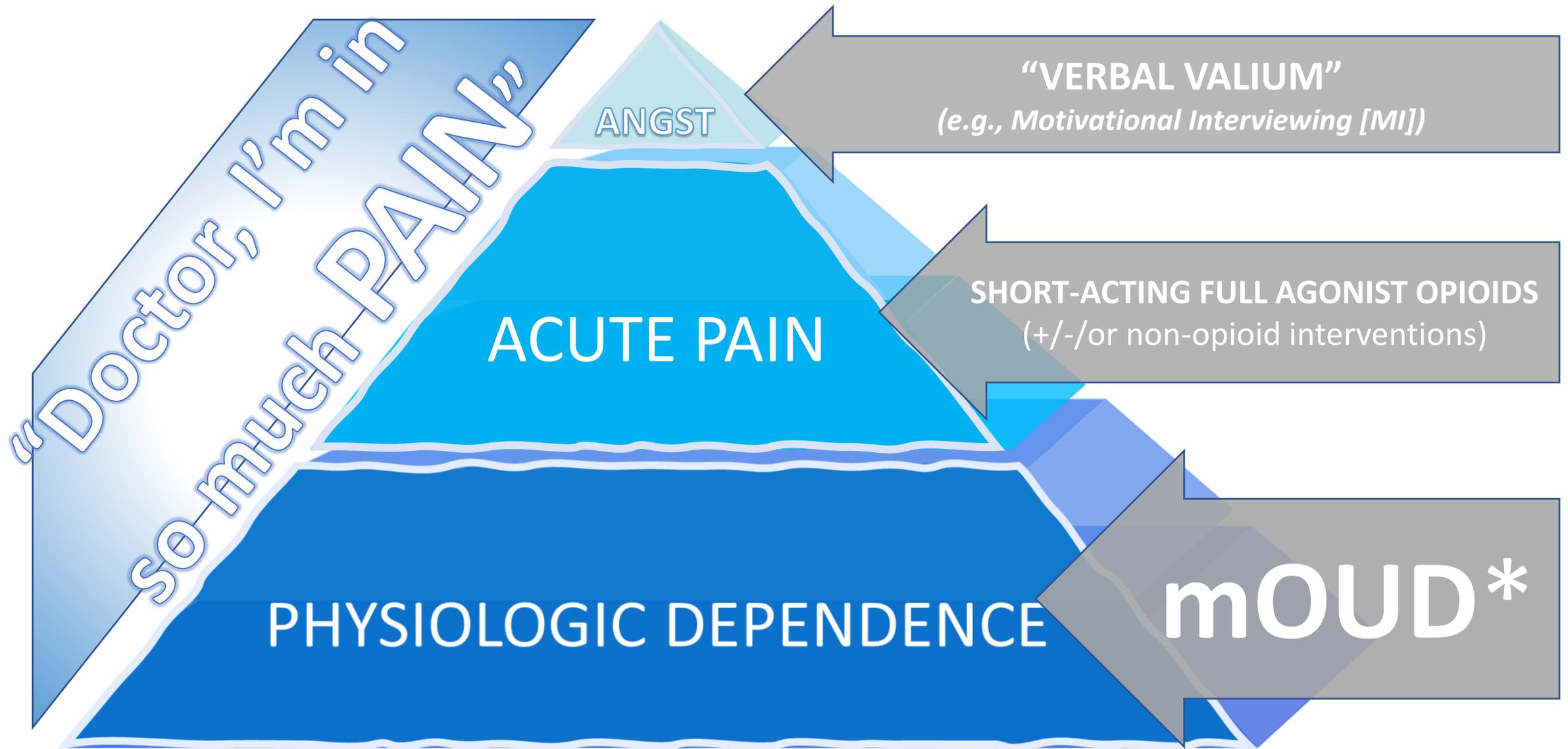
**Delayed
clearance of
fentanyl and
norfentanyl**

Table 2. μ -Opioid Receptor Binding Affinities (K_i) for Commonly Used Opioids and Antagonists

Opioid	K_i (nM)
Sufentanil	0.1380 ³
Buprenorphine	0.2157³
Hydromorphone	0.3654 ³
Morphine	1.168 ³
Fentanyl	1.346 ³
Naloxone	1.518 ³
Methadone	3.378 ³
Remifentanil	21.1 ⁴
Oxycodone	25.87 ³
Hydrocodone	41.58 ³
Codeine	734.2 ³
Tramadol	12,486 ³

Buprenorphine has extremely **high affinity** relative to other opioids

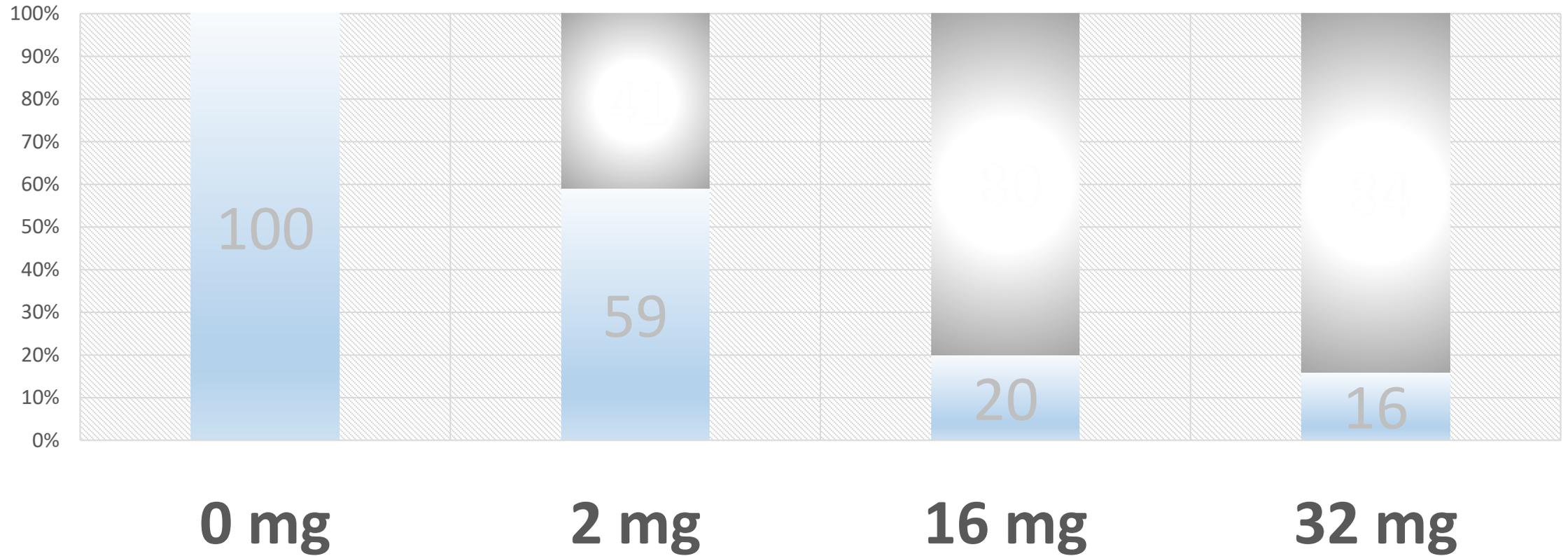
(Leighton et al 2017)



**mOUD = medication to treat opioid use disorder; e.g., methadone or buprenorphine-naloxone*

μ opioid receptor availability at various daily buprenorphine concentrations

■ Available
■ Not available



What precipitated withdrawal feels like



When mu receptor activation drops precipitously (e.g., when you administer naloxone to a patient high on fentanyl)

Perhaps free-falling through an elevator shaft is a better analogy...



NEWS

Man Falls Down Empty Elevator Shaft In SoHo, Survives Urban Nightmare

BY [CLAIRE LAMPEN](#)

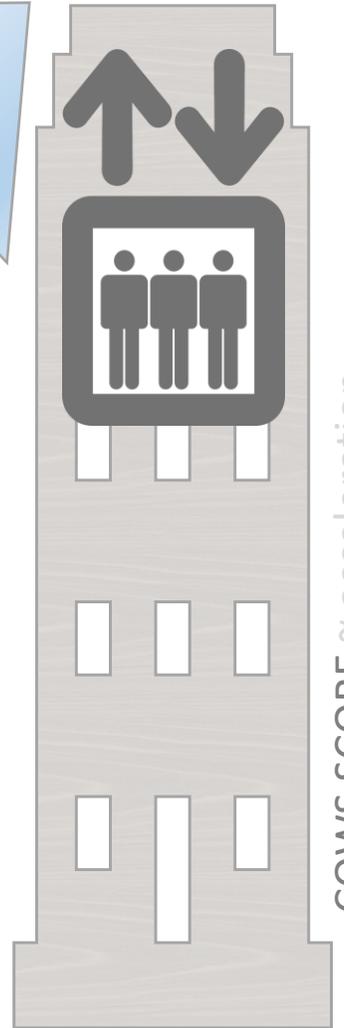
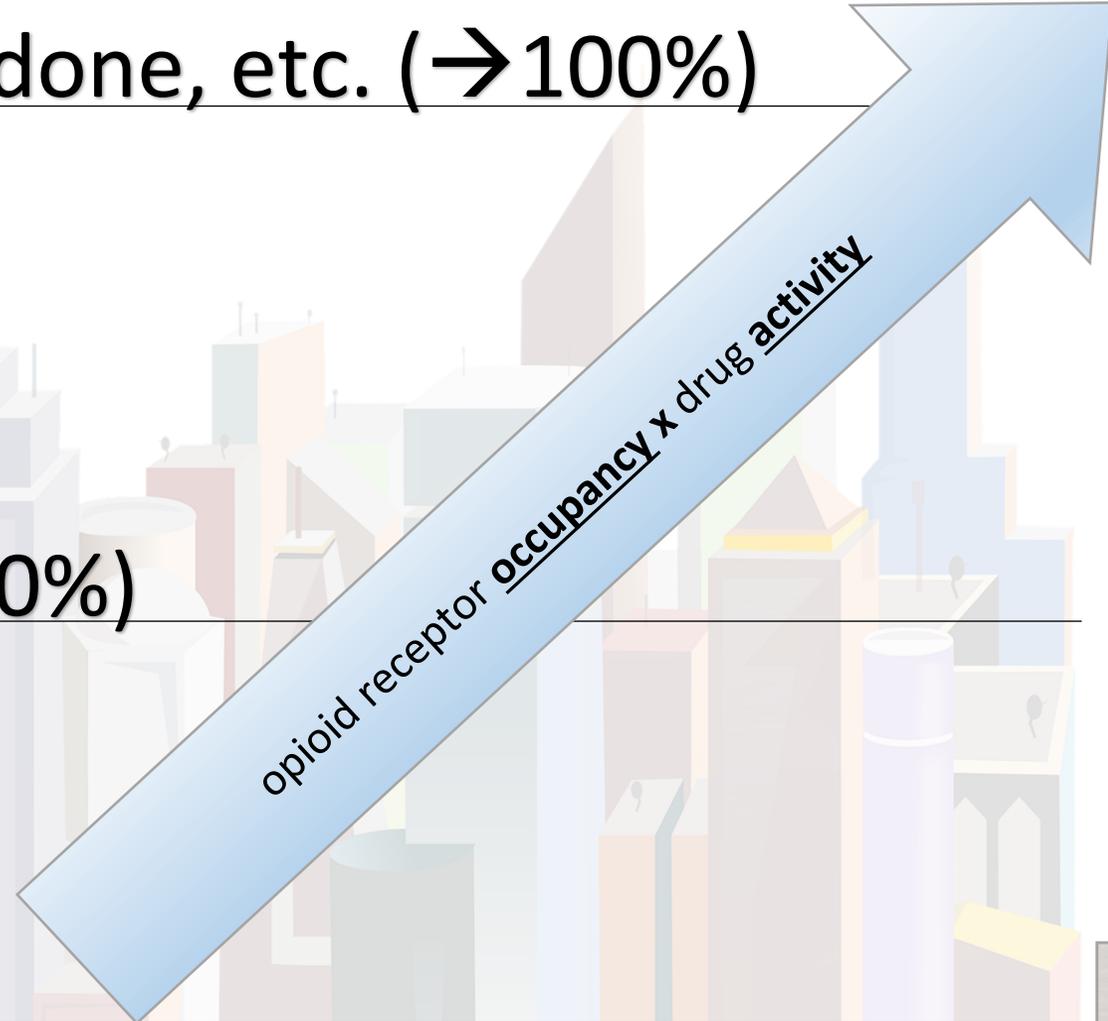
FEB. 26, 2019 5:23 P.M. • [40 COMMENTS](#)



Methadone, Oxycodone, etc. (→100%)

Buprenorphine (~40%)

Naloxone (~0%)



Starting medication treatment

The selection of medication to treat opioid withdrawal (e.g., methadone or buprenorphine) should be based on a shared decision-making process which integrates both the preferences and past experiences of patients and the clinical judgment of providers (see below).

Methadone	Buprenorphine
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid in patients with <i>QT prolongation</i>• May be started immediately to treat opioid withdrawal, regardless of recent exposure to fentanyl or other opioids• Patients who receive a few doses of methadone to treat withdrawal <i>may still initiate buprenorphine later</i> in their hospitalization**	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May restart immediately if patient took their last dose of buprenorphine in the last 72 hours• Otherwise, wait for <u>COWS score</u> of 8 or higher before giving first dose** <p>**Special circumstances which may necessitate low-dose buprenorphine initiation (microdosing) or consult to addiction / psychiatry (if available):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transitioning from methadone to buprenorphine• Fentanyl exposure† in the last week• History of precipitated withdrawal• Severe pain requiring round-the-clock treatment with high-dose opioid medications

**Buprenorphine* here refers to both buprenorphine-naloxone and buprenorphine monoprodu

†Assume fentanyl exposure (unless proven otherwise by laboratory toxicology results) in any patient who has injected or insufflated non-prescription opioids within the last week



Low-Dose Buprenorphine Initiation (“Microdosing”)

low-dose buprenorphine initiation indicated for patient (see earlier)

Patient managed with methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) (e.g., 40+ mg of methadone for 7+ days)

Patient *NOT* managed with MMT, but may have had recent opioid exposures, such as:

- Fentanyl (iatrogenic or illicit)
- Short-acting opioids (e.g., oxycodone)
- Brief course of low dose methadone (e.g., ≤40 mg x 2-3 days)

Consider LONG protocol

Consider SHORT protocol

SHORT protocol for low-dose buprenorphine initiation

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider starting taper of full-agonist opioids if patient’s clinical condition allows (e.g., adequate pain control)* • Apply buprenorphine patch (20 mcg, or equivalent) at 8:00 AM (ideally) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the first 2 mg dose of a buprenorphine-containing product[§] around 10:00 AM** • As tolerated / if requested by patient, consider administering additional doses of buprenorphine in 2 - 4 mg increments every 2 to 4 hours,** up to a maximum total dose of 8 mg of buprenorphine on day 2† • Remove buprenorphine patch at 8:00 pm (approximately 36 hours after administration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the AM dose of a buprenorphine-containing product equal to the cumulative dose administered on Day 2** • As tolerated / if requested by patient, consider administering additional doses of buprenorphine in 2-4 mg increments every 2 to 4 hours,** up to a maximum total dose of 12 mg of buprenorphine on day 3†

LONG protocol for low-dose buprenorphine initiation

Day 1	Day 2	Days 3 - 7	Day 8
•Continue methadone	• Administer the first 2 mg dose	•Continue methadone or	•Stop methadone



Conclusion: SUD is treatable in medical settings



- Hospitalization is a clinical opportunity to identify and initiate treatment for alcohol and opioid use disorders.
- FDA-approved medications for alcohol use disorder (naltrexone, acamprosate, disulfiram) support recovery.
- Opioid use disorder treatment includes opioid agonist therapy (methadone, buprenorphine) and harm reduction strategies.

References

Kast KA, Sidelnik SA, Nejad SH, Suzuki J. Management of alcohol withdrawal syndromes in general hospital settings. *BMJ*. 2025;388:e080461. Published 2025 Jan 8. doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-080461

Weimer MB, Herring AA, Kawasaki SS, Meyer M, Kleykamp BA, Ramsey KS. ASAM Clinical Considerations: Buprenorphine Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder for Individuals Using High-potency Synthetic Opioids. *J Addict Med*. 2023;17(6):632-639. doi:10.1097/ADM.0000000000001202

Winder GS, Clifton EG, Denysenko L, et al. "But I didn't drink!": What to do with discordant phosphatidylethanol results. *Liver Transpl*. 2024;30(2):213-222. doi:10.1097/LVT.0000000000000223





Mass General Brigham