

## **MINUTES: OPIOID, PAIN AND ADDICTION COMMITTEE 5/20/2025 By Zoom**

### **ATTENDEES:**

|                         |                          |                                 |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Staff: Alyssa Mills     | Elizabeth A Goldberg, NP | Brian Ricci (PDMP)              |
| Dr. Joseph Adams, Chair | Dr. Erica Isles          | Dr. Keya Sau                    |
| Tsela Barr.             | Dr. Sangeeta Iyer        | Irfan Suleman, MD               |
| Adrian Catwell (PDMP)   | Dr. Paul Katz            | Dr. James Taylor                |
| Marian Currens, CRNP    | Dr. Sarah Merritt        | Shannon Tieman, CRNP            |
| Dr. Bethany DiPaula.    | Dr. Dan Morhaim          | Sandra Yankosky (OCSA Director) |
| Dr. Drew Fuller         | Laura Pedone, CRNP       |                                 |

**Minutes of the March 18, 2025 meeting were approved.**

### **IS IT TIME TO WEAN? ENGAGING THE BENZODIAZEPINE EPIDEMIC**

Drew Fuller, MD and Shannon Tieman, PMHNP from Brightwell Recovery Health presented on the Benzodiazepine Engagement and Safer Taper program (BEST-T). This novel program is based on the Ashton methodology and utilizes patient-centered engagement for benzodiazepine weaning and de-prescribing. It is one of the only formal such programs in the Mid-Atlantic region. The BEST-T program converts patients over to long-acting less concentrated benzodiazepines such as diazepam and then proceeds with a slow wean over months or even years. The weaning is done in collaboration with the patient while anxiety and mood disorder symptoms are managed with the psychiatric nurse practitioner team with non-controlled medications. The program has been in operation for over two years and has seen a 70% reduction in the benzodiazepine equivalent dose with many patients achieving reductions of 90%. The program was featured at the Maryland DC Society of Addiction Medicine Annual meeting in February 2025 and is being prepared for a CME program to be shared statewide. The slides and video are available online at the MedChi website.

### **BRIEF ANXIETY COUNSELING FOR THE NON-MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER**

Presented by Joe Adams, MD, FASAM.

Dr. Adams has provided this type of counseling for many years in SUD and primary care settings, and participated in developing a one-page patient handout, along with Sally Winston Psy.D, founder of ASDI: The Anxiety and Stress Disorders Institute of Maryland. The handout (available on the MedChi website along with the presentation slides and video) includes [guides to mental health apps](#), and self-help resources validated by RCTs. Self-help alone, and when accompanied by brief or very brief counseling, is evidence-based for anxiety. Brief counseling may consist of orientation to self-help resources, and (time permitting) reviewing additional information such as that found in the handout. Self-help, with or without brief counseling, has also been shown to be 'trans-diagnostic' for anxiety disorders, so that specific anxiety diagnoses need not be established by a non-mental health provider (although it is very useful therapeutically to clearly identify panic attacks if present. Taking BZDs '[PRN](#)' may perpetuate anxiety, and make them harder to taper. Transitioning to [By-The-Clock](#) use may be a helpful first step, regardless of whether a patient is engaged in tapering (unless BZDs are used PRN infrequently for phobias).

### **DISCUSSION**

Minutes by Joe Adams, MD, FASAM

Next Meeting: Tue July 15, 2025, 6:30 pm EST