

Inter-LACES

Los Angeles County Evaluation System: An Outcomes Reporting Program

August 2013

What is Vivitrol?

Vivitrol is injectable, extended release naltrexone. It is an opioid antagonist. It works by blocking receptors in the brain that are responsible for the “high” a person feels. Vivitrol is not habit forming or addictive.

Vivitrol in Los Angeles County

Vivitrol has been shown to reduce cravings. In LA County, patients on Vivitrol were more likely to engage in and complete treatment than those not on Vivitrol. Patients also report achieving recovery goals while using Vivitrol.

Success Stories Among Patients Utilizing Vivitrol

“A dually diagnosed male reported that after getting Vivitrol he felt he had a clear mind for the first time...he felt “normal” ... he did not have a craving for alcohol nor did he have racing thoughts of wanting to drink alcohol... [He] reported that since getting on Vivitrol he is now able to not only focus on his substance abuse treatment, but also his mental health treatment. [He] stated that VIVITROL has helped him focus on getting back on psych meds and now feels a lot more “stable.” – Male patient at Prototypes

Vivitrol is an injectable, extended release form of naltrexone, which is approved by the FDA for the treatment of alcohol and opioid use disorders. Vivitrol is an opioid receptor antagonist that blocks the mu-opioid receptors in the brain. Thus, the “high” or “buzz” is reduced and cravings to use alcohol or opioids are reduced. Vivitrol is not habit forming or addictive.

In 2010, Los Angeles (L.A.) County Department of Public Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Control designed and implemented a pilot project to increase access to Vivitrol to publicly funded treatment organizations in L.A. County.

To date, two reports have been written on the results and articles are being drafted. But what are the patients who use Vivitrol saying? This edition of the newsletter recounts stories from providers and some directly from patients who have received at least one dose of the medication – Vivitrol.



A Success Story

“One of our very first Vivitrol patients reported that she is still sober [after 3 years]... The patient said that she felt that Vivitrol helped her transition from the treatment program back into the community...Today she is working to become a teacher.”

*–Antelope Valley
Rehabilitation Center*

"At the time [the patient, a 45 year old Hispanic Male] entered [Tarzana], he had been drinking for 15 years...he drank 750mL of vodka daily...His family was fed up. He risked losing [them]. He was on the verge of homelessness and unemployment... After taking Vivitrol ... his life dramatically changed... After seven months of Vivitrol the patient reported that his urges and cravings had disappeared. With the foundation of Vivitrol and the outpatient program this patient was able to stop drinking and not only obtain one job, but two jobs.... His wife and children are happy to have him back in their lives. The patient is also very happy that he has been able to do so well in his sobriety and contributes most of it to Vivitrol." - Tarzana Treatment Center

A male patient from Behavioral Health Services recalls, "[When I entered residential treatment for heroin] I had immense cravings to use. I wanted to change my life, but [I had an] obsession to use and I felt utterly hopeless. I was introduced to Vivitrol and took it for 6 months. I have now been drug free for over 9 months and I have zero cravings. Today I wake up happy and excited to "Live" rather than just "Exist". I am so grateful for the opportunity to have taken Vivitrol and would strongly recommend it to any person struggling with an opiate addiction or alcoholism...it offers them a better chance to recover effectively." – Behavioral Health Services

A dual diagnosed client reported that she when she would go to a local grocery to shop, she would usually be tempted to purchase alcohol when passing the alcohol aisle. She used to go to great lengths to round up enough money to be able to purchase alcohol. Client stated that while being on Vivitrol she no longer has a desire to drink alcohol and is no longer tempted to purchase it when going grocery shopping. Client expressed that she has noticed major progress for herself and her cravings for alcohol no longer exist. The client plans to get second injection.

A dually diagnosed 40-year-old female who was in treatment for 5 months at Prototypes noticed major progress in her recovery. In the past, she would go to great lengths to obtain enough money to purchase alcohol at the grocery store (a trigger for her). However, after one dose of Vivitrol she reported that she did not have the desire to drink nor was she tempted to purchase alcohol when grocery shopping - Prototypes

The evaluation of the implementation of Vivitrol into the L.A. County treatment system revealed that, although no causal conclusions can be made, compared to patients that do not use Vivitrol, Vivitrol patients were more likely to be engaged and retained in treatment and were more likely to "leave treatment with satisfactory progress" towards their treatment goals or to "complete treatment." Patients who took at least one dose also reported significant reductions in cravings.

Future studies may focus on examining the motivation of patients who agree to take the medication as compared to those who do not take the medication.

This project is supported by the Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC). For more information regarding LACES, please consult our web site at: www.laces-ucla.org.

References available upon request.