



**Relais Méthadone**



**Manual of Clinical  
services**

Relais Clinical Services are provided by  
the **Cran**

The Centre de Recherche et d'Aide pour Narcomanes (CRAN) welcomes you to its low-threshold service Relais.

Staff at Relais will accompany you during the entire course of your treatment. Our team will take into consideration your particular situation and that of close family and friends. We therefore encourage your family, friends or spouse to meet with us should they feel they need it. We can provide them with information and answer their questions about treatment and services we provide. If they wish, they can obtain psychosocial services at the CRAN through our Regular Clinical Services.

This manual describes the services we have put into place and how you and close family and friends can benefit from them. You will find instructions on how to use the substitution medication<sup>1</sup> that your doctor has prescribed as well as a description of your responsibilities and those of staff concerning your medication.

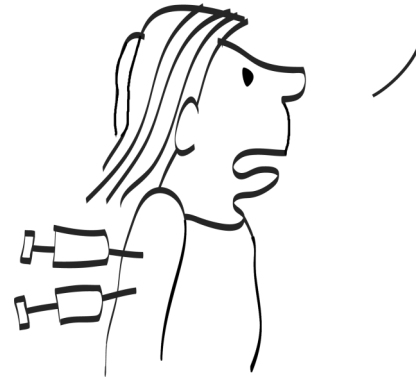
*You will also find a section that helps you solve problems that you might encounter with your prescription and/or medication.*

<sup>1</sup> *The substitution medication that we prescribe has adverse effects and is intended for persons already dependent on opioids. Sudden interruption of your medication can lead to severe symptoms.*



*Physicians, nurses and psychosocial workers consult each other on a regular basis to adapt our services to your personal situation. In order to help you help yourself, we will ask you to get actively involved in your treatment.*

QUEL PROBLÈME ?



*We wish to assure you that the information contained in your file is strictly confidential. In order to divulge its contents, your authorization is required.*

*This manual belongs to you. You can provide copies to your family and members of your entourage to inform them of our services.*

***The Relais Team***

  
**Relais Méthadone**



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## Notes

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## Important information

Opting for substitution treatment is not always easy and may lead sometimes to unexpected situations. Below you will find general information that might be useful to you.

## What services do we provide and to whom?

Our services are intended for persons whose precarious living conditions make it difficult to ensure their follow up in more conventional substitution treatments. Persons undergoing treatment can be dependent on opioids as well as on other substances. Our objectives are to provide you with services that are adapted to your situation and to accompany you, at your own rhythm, on the path to social reintegration.

Close family and friends can also benefit from our support and information services; psychosocial accompaniment is not offered through Relais but through the Cran's Regular Clinical Services.

### Length of services

Our services are transitory, which means that once you have reached a certain level of stability in both bio-psycho-social and drug use areas, we will discuss with you a transfer to a regular treatment centre.

## Notes

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**In closing**, we know that this manual touches only on the main aspects of the services provided by Relais at the Cran. You or your close family and friends may have other questions as treatment unfolds. Do not hesitate to talk to a member of our services.

Tell your family and friends to feel free to get information about our services and to meet with us.

We hope very much that our services will be of help to you.

**Your doctor** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your nurse** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your psychosocial worker** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your pharmacist** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Mathieu Abbas

The length of substitution treatment varies from one person to another. Treatment can last several years.

Difficulties you encounter along the way might lead you to interrupt your treatment. Rest assured that it is always possible to resume treatment as long as you meet eligibility criteria.

### **Substitution medication dosage (for methadone and suboxone)**

The dose you have been prescribed should prevent you experiencing cravings or feeling “stoned”. The dose is intended to make you feel comfortable for 24 hours and enable you go about your daily activities. The medication prescription is based on your needs and it varies enormously from one person to another; it will probably need to be readjusted based on your health status.

### **Methadone**

The medication we prescribe is intended for persons already dependent on opioids, and unfortunately, it has some adverse effects.



### **How to solve them?**

Tell hospital professionals about your medication. They will contact your treating doctor or the nurse on duty at our services.

Call your nurse before the closing time of our services in order to arrange for a change of pharmacies. This type of request requires time: therefore, there might be no solution.

At first, contact your nurse. It is possible that even after consulting with staff, there might be no solution.

You need to discuss the situation with your doctor or nurse who will then consult with each other. There might be no solution.

Contact your nurse to find out if it is possible to use the services of another pharmacy.

It is possible to change pharmacies. You need to anticipate a delay because a new prescription is required and we need to inform both pharmacies.

Contact us. We will evaluate your request based on your intervention plan.

You are responsible for your medication in case of loss. Even if we consult with staff, there might be no solution.

## Problems!

I've had an accident and I'm in hospital.

I'm invited over the week-end and it's already late Friday afternoon.

The length of my prescription has expired and I can't drop by Relais.

My medication was stolen.

I have to go away for a few days and I have no medication dose to take with me.

I want to switch pharmacies.

I can't go to the clinic and I would like the prescription to be sent to me by fax.

I lost my medication on the bus.

Here is what you need to know about the medication and the precautions you need to take:

- Methadone is a synthetic opioid. It leads to **significant physical dependence**. Sudden interruption of treatment triggers cravings, a state that normally occurs within a few days.
- Like any other medication, methadone can create **adverse effects**, such as constipation, sweating, weight gain, erectile difficulties, anorgasmia or drowsiness.
- If taken incorrectly, methadone can be **very dangerous and even fatal to a person other than yourself**. You must scrupulously keep your bottles out of the reach of children and other people. As a result of taking even a **minimal** dose of methadone, a person who is not dependent on opioids can stop breathing and die.
- Methadone can **cause light drowsiness**, especially at the start of treatment. It is recommended that you abstain from performing activities which require constant vigilance like driving a car or operating machinery.

Once we establish your level of tolerance to the medication and prescribe you an appropriate dosage, you will be able to resume these activities.

- Methadone must be used with caution. When you consult other healthcare professionals, you must tell them that you are taking methadone that has been prescribed to you.
- This information is **critical**<sup>2</sup> in order to safely determine what other medication you might need eventually.
- The desired effect of prescribed methadone can be **altered** by the intake of other products. Should this happen, you must inform a member of the nursing staff and your doctor.
- Combining methadone with other drugs can be **dangerous**. You must pay particular attention to benzodiazepines (Valium™, Serax™, Rivotril™, etc.).
- Drink alcohol with moderation. The majority of fatal overdoses involving methadone result from intoxication to several substances.

### Suboxone: an alternative to methadone

In November 2007, Health Canada approved suboxone as a new medication intended for the substitution treatment of opiod dependence.

<sup>2</sup> We recommend that you tell your treating physician that you are taking substitution medication. You should also inform the doctor who has prescribed you methadone of any illnesses you might have.

### How to solve them?

Tell your pharmacist. He might suggest that you stay 20 minutes at the pharmacy after you have taken your medication.

Find out if it is possible to get your medication and what procedures are in place. Then, contact your pharmacist or nurse to let them know.

Come to the clinic and explain the situation to your nurse. You should expect your medication dosage to be re-evaluated and decreased by the doctor.

Call your nurse to discuss options.

Advise the prison authorities that you are taking medication. During your stay, your medication will be provided to you by following the procedures put into place by the establishment. You can also contact us by calling collect.

You can call us and ask to speak with your psychosocial worker.

### Problems related to your prescription

In order to help you solve problems concerning your medication, you will find below a list of common problems and their solution.

#### Problems?

When I take my methadone, I don't feel well and I feel like I will throw up.

I've been arrested by police and brought to the police station before I've had a chance to drink my dose of methadone.

I have not taken my medication in the past three days.

I'm sick and I don't know if I can take other medications.

I've been brought to a detention centre.

I'm feeling anxious and panicky but I don't know the reason.

Here is what you need to know about your medication and the precautions you need to take:

- Suboxone is a tablet that melts under the tongue. It is made of a **combination of buprenorphine and naloxone**.
- As with methadone, this medication prevents withdrawal symptoms, reduces the constant urge to consume and decreases the effects of other opioids without producing a state of euphoria or "high".
- **Adverse effects** are similar to those associated with methadone although they are not as strong.
- Due to the presence of naloxone in suboxone, the intravenous administration of suboxone **immediately** creates withdrawal symptoms.
- If you keep suboxone or methadone at home, the same level of caution is required for both. As for methadone, suboxone can be very **dangerous and even fatal for a person other than yourself**.
- Suboxone could be **less effective than methadone** for some people but is still a viable alternative to it.
- As with methadone, **the risk of overdose** is significantly increased when suboxone is combined with other opioids, alcohol, benzodiazepines or other medications.

- Suboxone has been approved as a *médicament d'exception* (medication of exception). It is therefore reimbursed by the Assurance médicaments du Québec for the substitution treatment of opioid dependence in the following cases: intolerance to methadone, failure or counter-indication of treatment with methadone or unavailability or lack of access to a methadone maintenance program. Otherwise, suboxone can be prescribed to you as long as you will pay the cost.

Your treatment team will discuss with you whether suboxone meets your needs and you meet eligibility criteria for reimbursement.

### How do our services work?

Our services are provided without the need for a timed appointment. However, you will be given **an appointed day** with a team of professionals responsible for your follow-up. We pay particular attention to the critical stages of treatment: admission to our services, the length of the prescription, dosage, possible relapses and transfer to regular treatment services at the end of the program.

Each stage requires you to meet with staff from three different services: psychosocial, medical and nursing.



In memory of Jean-François Rioux

## Your own responsibilities

Treatment is a partnership and your collaboration is essential. To this end, you commit yourself to:

- providing information required to obtain adequate services
- managing adequately the medication that you will eventually be able to take home, and to understanding the risks of using it incorrectly
- choosing services that suit your situation
- keeping the places where services are provided safe
- knowing the services and their limits
- collaborating with your treatment team for your follow up by keeping in mind the expiry date of your prescription and coming to the clinic
- respecting the pharmacist and his or her staff

## Admission

Your first meeting will be with a **psychosocial worker** who will discuss with you the help you need based on your social situation.

You will then meet with a **nurse**. She will provide you with information about treatment and on how the services work. She will answer your questions and take down information on your health and drug use.

Your **doctor** will diagnose your opioid dependence, finalize your admission and prescribe your medication.

In order to document your opioid dependence and use of other drugs, you will need to do a urine screening test. You will also need to sign an authorization form to allow us to obtain a summary of your relevant medical history.

## Length of prescription dosage

Weekly follow-up with your treatment team (i.e. the team you met at admission) allows us to evaluate your medication dosage, health status and need for vaccination. Your team also provides the support you need in your social undertakings. The length of your prescription is approximately one month.

**If you cannot come on your appointed day** to meet with your doctor, **you can obtain your prescription** from your psychosocial worker or nurse over the following days, **but the dosage cannot be increased**.

At all times, if you have an urgent health or social problem, you can come to see us during opening hours.

We recommend that you signal any problem that you think might be linked to a dosage that is too strong or too weak.

Please also note that an **increase in dosage is conditional upon regular visits at the pharmacy**.

**If you are absent for three consecutive days or more, the prescription in force will be stopped and the dosage will need to be re-evaluated** by medical staff.

### **Follow-up**

Once your maintenance dosage is determined, follow-up meetings are usually planned on a monthly basis. However, in-between visits are possible at all times except when it concerns changes to your medication. These need to be discussed with your appointed doctor.

### **Responsibilities of Relais**

We hope our services will help you achieve your life projects. To this end, we commit ourselves to having you seen regularly by a professional. We also commit to:

- respecting your ability to choose among services those that suit you
- informing you of the range of services and procedures that have been put into place
- ensuring the confidentiality of the information contained in your file
- providing you with clear, precise and complete information about your health status
- ensuring that you understand the adverse effects, the safe use and the risks of your medication
- obtaining your informed consent
- informing you of staff qualifications
- providing a safe place for services
- providing you with the possibility to file a complaint
- strengthening your ability to be responsible for the services you receive.

## Filing a complaint

We pride ourselves in providing you and your close family and friends with high quality services. If you think they can be improved or if you are not satisfied with the services you have received or a decision that concerns you, we would like to know about it.

We first invite you to talk to a member of your treatment team. If you are still unsatisfied, you can file a complaint in writing or by telephone by calling the Commissaire aux plaintes (Complaints commissioner).



Only in the case of drowsiness due to too high a dosage can the dosage be changed on any day.

**Exchange of injection material is possible** over the course of your follow-up. Upon request, your psychosocial worker or nurse will hand you new, sterile injection material and take in used material in order to reduce injection-related risks.



Mathieu Abbas

## **Stabilization period**

After being in treatment for a minimum of six months, a person who meets stabilization criteria moves to a **period of transition**. Follow-up is then scheduled on an appointment time basis. Meetings allow us to monitor your progress, to set future objectives and to prepare a transfer to a regular treatment centre. A monthly drug screening test is required to qualify for an unsupervised dose (commonly referred to as “**privilege**”).

### **What if you choose withdrawal from your substitution medication instead of transferring to a regular service?**

We will discuss with you whether this is feasible within our service. We encourage gradual withdrawal to minimize physical and psychological discomfort. Your doctor will encourage you to meet with nursing and psychosocial services to discuss the conditions required to achieve abstinence from opioids.

### **What if you decide to quit treatment?**

If you have stopped coming to Relais for less than a year, you can resume treatment without major delay except if, based on your follow-up history, you have been advised of a specific plan for re-admission. Generally, we encourage you to return on your appointed day so that you may be welcomed by the same treatment team.

## **Expulsion from services**

Unfortunately, sometimes behaviors carry heavy consequences and it is impossible for the organization to continue to provide services, no matter the solutions that have been suggested.

Services are then discontinued and a gradual withdrawal from medication is offered for a determined period of time to the person who has been expelled. All expulsions are for a limited time clearly defined by the Disciplinary Committee and are transmitted in writing.

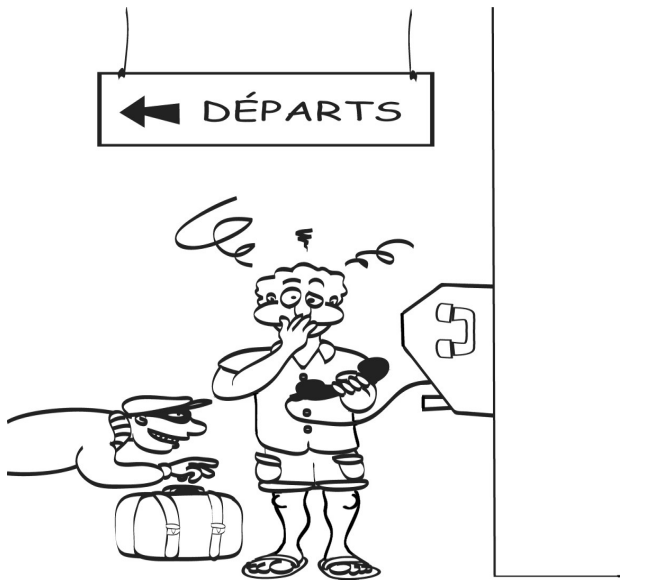
During these procedures, you can be represented or accompanied by a person of your choice. Resources are available to you, including:

Centre d'assistance et d'accompagnement aux plaintes  
(CAAP) de Montréal:  
(514) 861-5998 or 1 (877) 767-2227

Méta d'Âme: (514) 528-9000

## The disciplinary process

All violent and prejudicial behavior is reviewed by the team. If your behavior warrants such discussion, you will be advised by a member of our staff. At your end, you will be expected to suggest a satisfactory solution that will enable us to continue to provide you with services without endangering the safety of people or property. While this process is taking place, we will suspend our services, but you will be able to receive your prescribed medication at the pharmacy. A member of the Disciplinary Committee will stay in touch with you and keep you informed of procedures. **It will be impossible for you to visit the Cran or to contact another staff member.**



If it has been more than a year since you have stopped attending, we will ask you to contact us by telephone so we may evaluate whether you still meet eligibility criteria.

If this is the case, we will then plan your re-admission.

## Who does what and how?

To guide you in your request for services, we have defined the responsibilities of the members of your treatment team.

Should we be unable to meet your needs, we will direct you to external resources.

We consider **pharmacists** and their staff indispensable partners in your substitution treatment.

They will answer your questions and support you through the difficulties you might encounter. Your cooperation with them is therefore essential.

Also note that **they can refuse to serve your medication if you show up intoxicated or drowsy.**

## What does your doctor do?

He or she is responsible for:

- Diagnosing your opioid dependence
- Initiating and adjusting your medication dosage
- Evaluating and monitoring your health status
- Ensuring that you are being monitored for any chronic medical conditions
- Referring you to specialized healthcare services and to a network of prescribing doctors
- Prescribing screening tests.

## What does your nurse do?

He or she is responsible for:

- Helping to evaluate your health
- Informing you about the medication at the start of and during the course of treatment
- Ensuring you are receiving follow-up healthcare services such as blood tests, bandages, etc.
- Providing health prevention and maintenance services: vaccination against hepatitis A and B, flu, tuberculosis and ITSS.
- Accompanying you during long-term medical follow-up
- Accompanying you should you choose a planned withdrawal from your medication
- Planning healthcare activities based on stated needs and expectations: nutrition, hygiene, sleep and birth control
- Accompanying and supporting you during crises and occasional problem situations.

## Keeping people and places safe

The Cran is a specialized centre with its own operating rules. The organization and its staff have put strategies in place to ensure a safe place for clients and a safe workplace for professionals. **Therefore, violent or intimidating behavior taking place at the Cran can lead to a change in the services you receive, up to and including expulsion from our services.**



In memory of Jean-Francois Rioux

## Pregnancy and childbirth

As in the case of heroin, substitution medication can cause menstruations to stop. This does not mean that you are pregnant and that you no longer need to use contraception. If you become pregnant while you are on methadone treatment or if you start methadone treatment while being pregnant, know that methadone does not lead to a risk of malformation to your baby. However, sudden interruption of methadone or heroin during pregnancy can be dangerous to the baby you carry. Current scientific data suggest that methadone is safer for the foetus than suboxone. If you become pregnant and already take methadone, it is preferable not to change medication. If you already take suboxone, you can continue treatment without risk by taking subutex (which contains buprenorphine only). The Cran's Regular Clinical Services provide services that are adapted to the needs of pregnant women. These services are provided during pregnancy and after childbirth. Should this be the case, we will transfer you to these services. Please ask a member of your treatment team for information. At birth, your child could need particular care. If the doctors supervising your childbirth are advised beforehand, they will be able to provide your baby with the care he or she will need at birth. Your baby will need to stay in hospital under medical supervision. If you wish to breastfeed your baby, talk to your doctor.

## What does your psychosocial worker do?

He or she is responsible for:

- Helping you in your efforts to obtain identity cards (such as your health insurance card), to get accommodation and to ensure your subsistence
- Supporting you in your efforts to normalize your judicial situation
- Accompanying and supporting you at the start of treatment, during relapse or withdrawal
- Helping you identify resources for therapy or disintoxication and providing you with referrals as needed
- Accompanying and supporting you during crises or occasional problem situations
- Accompanying you to organizations and establishments in order to facilitate and support your social reintegration
- Preparing you for your transfer to the Cran's Regular Clinical Services
- Identifying your needs for follow-up and ongoing psychotherapy and those of members of your entourage, and referring you to psychosocial workers at Cran's Regular Clinical Services. These services provide regular, scheduled follow-up meetings.
- Referring you to appropriate resources (disintoxication, specialized tests, psychosocial intervention, etc.)

**All of these services are provided without a scheduled appointment, ideally on your appointed day, except in the case of an emergency.**

MOI, J'AI PAS DE PROBLÈME AVEC ÇA...  
C'EST MES AMIS QUI VEULENT  
QUE JE ME FASSE SOIGNER



### **Travel and temporary transfers to other specialized centres**

Such undertakings require time. It is always easier to solve problems with calm rather than on an urgent basis.

To ensure a smooth departure, you must plan your itinerary ahead as much as possible in order to meet a number of conditions. We can assist you in your research by locating a specialized centre which can serve you. For a change of pharmacy, the procedure still requires time. However, it is easier to process a request if it is not made at the last minute!

### **Permanent transfers**

If you are planning to move and cannot continue to receive services at Relais, the procedures to follow are the same as for travel.

Organizing a permanent transfer to another centre requires even more time because of the low availability of treatment services.

## Choosing a pharmacy

You will be getting your medication at a pharmacy in your community. Your nurse can advise you on a pharmacy that best suits your situation.

A number of pharmacies have confidential service areas, but the majority of pharmacies on the Cran's list dispense substitution medication like any other medication. Should you choose to switch pharmacies, you will need a new prescription because a prescription for substitution medication is non-transferable. Your pharmacist will explain to you his or her own procedure to dispense substitution medication and inform you of related costs. He or she will also inform you of general operating rules and particular expectations. Please take note that **the pharmacist can not serve you if you have missed three consecutive doses of substitution medication.**

## Unsupervised doses (privileges)

Generally speaking, our services do not allow for unsupervised doses, except in certain cases. A decision is then taken by the team.

If you are in a period of transition, you are allowed one unsupervised dose per week. In this case, you become responsible for the dose of medication you bring home and you must be vigilant in keeping it safe and away from people in order to avoid putting anyone's life at risk.

## The facts about substitution medication

In Quebec, the prescription and distribution of substitution medication are regulated by two professional orders: the Collège des médecins du Québec and the Ordre des pharmaciens du Québec.

Consequently, staff at Relais are obligated to respect the standards concerning the use of medication. You too must conform to them.

These standards concern urine screening tests, take home methadone doses, travel as well as temporary and permanent transfers.

Below you will find information regarding these standards.

## Urine screening tests

A urine screening test is required at admission and each re-admission.

A test is also required if you are in a period of transition and waiting to be transferred to a regular treatment centre.