Case #11 from 1/18/17

Observations and Recommendations

Question:

**What recommendations would you make for our approach to assuming care of this patient who has, overall, shown good results on a stable dose of Suboxone (for example, frequency of visits, whether we should have the expectation of meeting with a counselor in addition to med management?)**

* Your decision to assume care and prescribe Suboxone is commendable! The interruption in treatment had placed her at high risk for relapse and was obviously impacting her life in very tangible ways. You were able to get her back on track quickly, and the fact that you did so without having complete records from her previous Suboxone clinic showed trust which sets a good tone for future interaction.
* It would be good to have frequent follow-ups initially to get a better sense of patient’s strengths and weaknesses in regards to maintaining sobriety - every 2 weeks seems reasonable for this patient given she had been stable on Suboxone before. It might be good to discuss reasons why it has been difficulty for her to follow up in clinic consistently and how you and your care team can accommodate her within reason.
* Set goals and expectations early on to get everyone on the same page; it might be useful to have this in writing.
* Consider more frequent urine toxicology tests at the beginning as way to gather more data and also to normalize it as part of the treatment plan. Be transparent about it and explain to patient that this is just one of the tools providers use to monitor progress.
* I don’t always require counselling because not everyone needs it, but in her case it makes sense given her comorbid psychiatric diagnoses and social stressors. One way to reframe the role of counselling with her is to discuss the psychological component of addiction and how this is a result of strong neural connection in the brain that can be triggered by psychological and social stimuli, and that counselling can help keep this neural connection in check as it can be activated anytime, even for someone who has been stable on Suboxone for years.