



**UPSTATE**  
FOUNDATION

## CAMPAIGN FOR CHILD & ADOLESCENT Mental Health



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#### UPSTATE OPIOID BRIDGE CLINIC

The Upstate Opioid Bridge Clinic is an innovative approach to aiding the fight against opioid use disorder, offering comprehensive treatment beginning with an initial dose of buprenorphine. A buprenorphine treatment plan can help patients who are abusing opioids and are at risk for overdose; the medication can also help those suffering from withdrawal and decrease cravings.

Established in 2017, the Upstate Bridge Clinic, which is a division of the emergency medicine department at Upstate University Hospital, is intended to address the opioid use disorder of



both illegal drugs, such as heroin, and prescribed medication, which has been a growing problem across the United States for many years. The pandemic has only increased those numbers, with lethal overdose cases rising again.

Patients arriving at the emergency department at Upstate, including adolescents, are evaluated, treated for withdrawal and referred, within three to five days, to the bridge clinic for further treatment. Any care provider can refer patients to the clinic, and patients can self-refer.

The clinic provides patients with short-term outpatient treatment to manage their opioid use disorder until they enter a rehab program or find a community provider for longer-term treatment. Bridge clinic services also include connecting patients to additional services in the community to help with food, housing, transportation and more.

A top priority of the clinic and its staff has been to shed the stigma associated with opioid use disorder. That, combined with the social services offered by support staff provided by Onondaga County called "peers," have greatly contributed to the success of the bridge clinic. Peer support specialists are often themselves in recovery and serve as a resource for individuals and families helping patients get connected to community treatment and with processes such as signing up for Medicaid or disability.

Referring patients to the bridge clinic has reduced the number of future emergency department visits among patients with opioid use disorder and helps patients stay in treatment.

The founder of the bridge clinic, Dr. Ross Sullivan, has published the first paper about the success of the facility in a nationally recognized journal, the *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*. The article notes that among patients who completed a bridge clinic consultation, there was a 42 percent reduction in return visits to the emergency department. Sullivan estimates they've seen about 1,000 patients through the bridge clinic since it opened and the data published in the survey shows that the clinic and its treatment programs are helping people decrease unsafe opioid use.