

Dr. Brian Louis Gadbois, MD (M.D. '10)

Psychiatrist, James A. Haley Veterans Affairs Hospital Addiction Clinic

By Paul F. Brown

When Brian Gadbois first entered FSU's College of Medicine he intended on becoming an orthopedic surgeon. Though he tested well on surgery during clinical rotations, he found the long hours in an operating room tedious. A self-described "people person," he longed for more patient connection and saw that successful surgeries don't always solve patients' problems.

"A patient on my surgery rotation had been cured of cancer, but at her follow-up appointment she was distraught about all these other things in her life," Gadbois said. "I realized that just because you physically cure someone doesn't mean that person will be happy. That was a benchmark for me. When I got to my psychiatry rotation, I loved it."

As a med student, he also appreciated FSU's emphasis on human care. "There was always that focus on the human element — not just being a good technician or good at processing data, but being a kind, considerate doctor as well."

His training helped Gadbois secure a general psychiatry residency in Tampa, leading to his employment there in the PTSD clinic at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital. He also worked a side job at a residential addiction treatment facility.

While addiction medicine hadn't previously been an area of interest for Gadbois, he learned how dramatically it could improve patients' lives — particularly those with opioid use disorder (OUD), which affects more than two million Americans. He refocused his career and moved to full time at the hospital's addiction clinic, where he handles both inpatient and outpatient treatments.

"For me, the turning point was when I started prescribing buprenorphine, one of the game-changing medications in treating opioid addiction," he said.

Buprenorphine, itself a class of opioid, keeps users from craving more opiates and minimizes symptoms of withdrawal. It's the main active ingredient in the brand-name oral medication Suboxone, and in the newer, injectable Sublocade.

"One study showed that opioid

dependent patients who are stable on buprenorphine had a 70% reduction in risk of death," Gadbois said. "That is massive. Any treatment that reduces death rates by 70% should be making headlines."

Other effective treatments for OUD exist, including Vivitrol, an injectable non-opioid medication that also treats alcohol dependence. Gadbois champions all of these, but believes Sublocade may better fit the needs of some patients. "It's basically a guarantee that you can't relapse on opioids while you're on it. If you try to take an opioid, you don't feel it."

Besides Sublocade being a lesser-known option, the fact that it's a controlled substance may discourage some clinics from considering it. Gadbois has pushed to make it more available since it hit the market in 2018. "I was the first doctor in the entire national VA healthcare system to order it for a patient," he said. "VA Tampa was the first VA in the country to use it, and for a while we were the number one user of it."

He helped multiple other clinics in the area become certified Sublocade providers, including branches of the national nonprofit WestCare, which employs Gadbois part time in its GulfCoast division. He continues to educate healthcare professionals and the public about these lifesaving treatments.

"Services are out there," he said. "At WestCare, for example, it's all grant funded. Patients can come in, get their labs and medication, talk to their counselor for support, and it's zero out of pocket. Help is available, if only people would reach out and get it."

LEARN MORE  VA.GOV

