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California Opioid  
Maintenance Providers

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*In case you missed it...*

## **California Progress Report**

### **Cutting Medi-Cal Drug Treatment Threatens Lives**

*By Dr. John McCarthy*

I wrote a letter to Governor Schwarzenegger on behalf of disabled patients currently being treated in the methadone treatment system, alerting him that eliminating the drug Medi-Cal program threatens the lives of hundreds of disabled patients. I am a psychiatrist and addiction medicine specialist in Sacramento, and I am the physician for about 300 patients on SSI disability whose health and lives would be endangered if they were forced to withdraw from methadone, if drug Medi-Cal was eliminated, as proposed by the governor.

Opiate withdrawal is a very disabling process, even if done slowly. It literally causes a seizure in multiple areas of the brain and this puts severe stress on all body organs, especially the heart, lungs, and liver. Those that have serious medical or psychiatric conditions, as these SSI disabled patients all do, are at very high risk for catastrophic medical events. Many are far too ill to survive. We physicians cannot be asked to harm our patients by withdrawing a medically necessary medication.

Although I am keenly aware of the dire economic problems the governor is dealing with, the issue at stake is moral and ethical.

Although Governor Schwarzenegger will be advised of other adverse economic and social consequences of ending drug Medi-Cal, I wrote to the governor to assure that he was aware of these life-threatening medical consequences.

Methadone treatment is a specialty area of medicine and not well understood. I hope my letter helps to put the most critical medical issues in perspective and that the governor will find a way of continuing this medication for the thousands of these patients throughout California who depend on it.

*John McCarthy, M.D., psychiatrist and Medical Director of Bi-Valley Medical Clinic in Sacramento.*

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