

An intervention which helps overcome the major impediments to **naltrexone treatment of alcoholism** – that many patients don't stick with it, and those who do often skip their pills – has now been codified in a manual.<sup>1</sup> Anonymously referred to in our NUGGETS on naltrexone (▶ [Links](#)), the intervention is known by its acronym, BRENDA. Based on motivational interviewing, the approach is long-term rather than intensive (▶ discussion in [OFFCUT](#), p. 19), integrates drug treatments with psychosocial therapy, focuses on teaching the patient strategies to ensure they take the pills, and aims to achieve physical and emotional health which may or may not entail abstinence. It was developed by a US team which found that outcomes from naltrexone were good only if patients took at least 80% of their pills. BRENDA was developed to nudge more patients above this threshold. When it was substituted for the weekly counselling sessions customary at a Philadelphia centre, 83% of BRENDA patients stayed in treatment for at least 12 weeks compared to 56% of the **LINKS** Nuggets **7.2 5.1** previous patients, and nearly 8 out of 10 exceeded the 80% compliance threshold compared to 6 out of 10 before, both statistically significant differences.<sup>2</sup> Though not as convincing as a randomised trial, the findings do suggest that BRENDA can spread the anti-relapse benefits of naltrexone to less motivated patients.

**1.** Volpicelli J.R. et al. *Combining medication and psychosocial treatments for addictions. The BRENDA approach.* Guilford Press, 2001. Available through bookshops.

**2** Pettinati H.M. et al. "Improving naltrexone response: an intervention for medical practitioners to enhance medication compliance in alcohol dependent patients." *Journal of Addictive Diseases*: 2000, 19(1), p. 71–83.