OPIOIDS AND CHRONIC PAIN

Many Americans suffer from chronic pain, a major public health concern in the United States. Patients with chronic pain deserve safe and effective pain management. At the same time, our country is in the midst of a prescription opioid overdose epidemic.

• The amount of opioids prescribed and sold in the US quadrupled since 1999, but the overall amount of pain reported hasn’t changed.

• There is insufficient evidence that prescription opioids control chronic pain effectively over the long term, and there is evidence that other treatments can be effective with less harm.

UNDERSTANDING PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that relieve pain by binding to receptors in your brain or body to reduce the intensity of pain signals reaching the brain. Opioid pain medications are sometimes prescribed by doctors to treat pain. Common types include:

• Hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin)
• Oxycodone (e.g., OxyContin)
• Oxymorphone (e.g., Opana), and
• Morphine

Opioids can have serious risks including addiction and death from overdose.

PRESCRIPTION OPIOID OVERDOSE IS AN EPIDEMIC IN THE US

As many as 1 in 4 people receiving prescription opioids long term in a primary care setting struggles with addiction.

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PROMOTING SAFER AND MORE EFFECTIVE PAIN MANAGEMENT

LEARN MORE | www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain provides recommendations to primary care doctors about the appropriate prescribing of opioid pain medications to improve pain management and patient safety:

- It helps primary care doctors determine when to start or continue opioids for chronic pain
- It gives guidance about medication dose and duration, and on following up with patients and discontinuing medication if needed
- It helps doctors assess the risks and benefits of using opioids

Doctors and patients should talk about:

- How opioids can reduce pain during short-term use, yet there is not enough evidence that opioids control chronic pain effectively long term
- Nonopioid treatments (such as exercise, nonopioid medications, and cognitive behavioral therapy) that can be effective with less harm
- Importance of regular follow-up
- Precautions that can be taken to decrease risks including checking drug monitoring databases, conducting urine drug testing, and prescribing naloxone if needed to prevent fatal overdose
- Protecting your family and friends by storing opioids in a secure, locked location and safely disposing unused opioids

CDC developed the Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain to:

- Help reduce misuse, abuse, and overdose from opioids
- Improve communication between primary care doctors and patients about the risks and benefits of opioid therapy for chronic pain

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