



## Pharmacists on the front lines

# Addressing prescription opioid abuse and overdose with your patients

## Balancing roles

You have multiple and complex roles – including evaluating new prescription orders with concurrent treatments, assessing the appropriateness of the particular medication, and reviewing prescription orders for signs of forgery/alteration.

### As a pharmacist, you can:

- **Assess.** Look for “red flags” that patients might be struggling with opioid use disorder or diverting medications, such as multiple prescribers, inconsistent or early fills and prescriptions originating from outside the immediate geographic area.
- **Verify.** Validate prescriber DEA registration and patient identification.
- **Consult.** If available, check a prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) as well as patient records.
- **Communicate.** Contact the prescriber with questions or concerns, talk to the patient and submit information from a PDMP, if available.

## Pharmacists: part of the team

### Managing pain. As a medication expert, you can:

- Educate patients on risks of opioids and ways to manage those risks.
- Review and monitor patients’ medications in collaboration with prescribers.
- Assist in implementing treatment plans with other health care team members.
- Provide drug information and recommendations to the health care team.

### Preventing abuse. When opioids are prescribed, increase follow-up and frequently assess risks and benefits. You can:

- Monitor for signs of aberrant behavior, abuse and diversion.
- Use PDMPs to identify patients at increased risk of overdose, such as those taking high dosages or obtaining opioids from multiple prescribers.
- Communicate with prescribers about any concerns or unusual behavior observed in patients.
- Monitor for risk of overdose, dispense naloxone per authority and counsel on how to use.

## Communicating with patients

In addition to increasing communication with prescribers, you can also talk to patients about the safe use of opioids. You can educate patients about:

- **Proper use.** Discuss how to take medication exactly as prescribed and the risks of using medication inappropriately. As an additional preventive measure, order labels for prescription opioids, through your regular ordering system, that read as follows: "Caution: Opioid. Risk of overdose and addiction."
- **Side effects.** Review most common side effects, and stress the importance of reporting side effects to their prescribers or pharmacists for effective management.
- **Medication fills.** Discuss and manage expectations regarding refill requirements and the importance of using one pharmacy for all medications.
- **Stockpiling medication.** Counsel patients about the dangers of saving unused medication.
- **Safe storage and disposal.** Explain how to safely store and dispose of unused medications to prevent diversion or misuse. AmerisourceBergen offers several safe drug disposal products through your regular ordering system. Ask your Sales Executive for more information.

Educational marketing materials to raise awareness of opioid abuse are available on [gnpbrandcentralstation.com](http://gnpbrandcentralstation.com). These materials can be inserted in prescription or shopping bags or displayed in your store.

## Simple ways to start conversations with patients

- What medications are you taking?
- What medications have you taken to manage pain, and how did you respond?
- Describe how you normally take your medications.
- How well is your medication controlling your pain?
- Are you experiencing any side effects from your pain medications?
- In addition to medications, what other ways are you managing your pain?
- Do you know which medications you should avoid while taking opioids?
- What questions do you have about your medications?

### Resources and education

American Pharmacists Association: [apha.org/topics-and-issues/prescription-drug-overdose](http://apha.org/topics-and-issues/prescription-drug-overdose)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Opioid Overdose: [cdc.gov/drugoverdose](http://cdc.gov/drugoverdose)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: [samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

PDMP Resource: [namsdl.org](http://namsdl.org)

Drug Enforcement Administration: [dea.gov](http://dea.gov)