

SAFE OPIOID PRESCRIBING

5 TIPS TO SAVE LIVES—AND CAREERS

People are dying in record numbers from opioid overdoses. Many prescriptions are written by inexperienced physicians who are unprepared for this crisis. It's important to learn about appropriate opioid and controlled substance prescriptions, monitoring of patients, and how to stay on the right side of the law in your prescribing practices. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Multiple pain management

strategies: Pain management must be based on the severity of pain with the use of multiple modalities. Your options include:

- non-pharmacological (e.g., exercise, physical therapy, rest);
- non-opioid pharmacologic (e.g., non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, acetaminophen, tricyclics);
- procedures (e.g., injections, blocks);
- devices; and
- opioids.

2. Key points when starting opioids:

Opioids can be risky. Ensure the potential benefits outweigh potential harm.

- Get a detailed history, including current and past drug or alcohol use and misuse, mental health disorders, and family history.
- Start at low dose, and short timeframes.
- Risks increase after three days and with rising dosages.
- Thorough documentation is critical, including medication dosages.

3. Monitoring chronic opioid use:

Closely monitor patients with Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) reviews, urine drug testing, updated histories, and exams. It's also important to continually check to see if opioid tapering is possible.

4. Red flags for abuse and diversion:

Beware that individuals with substance use disorder, or who are diverting opioids, may present with one or more red flags. Know them, watch for them, and explore them when identified.

5. Know drug combinations

to avoid: Avoid dangerous drug combinations, including benzodiazepines and sleep medications (i.e., Z-drugs).



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