Opioids

PRESCRIPTION OPIOID ABUSE, ADDICTION AND DIVERSION

1. Prescription drug abuse is the fastest growing drug problem in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that approximately three out of four prescription drug overdoses are caused by prescription opioids. Opioids play a role in 15,000 deaths annually, and account for more than 340,000 emergency department visits each year, according to the American Medical Association. The CDC says enough prescription painkillers were prescribed in 2010 to medicate every American adult around-the-clock for one month.

2. The issue is serious in Minnesota, too. During 2011, one in five admissions (20 percent) to addiction treatment programs in the Twin Cities was for heroin or other opiates. This is compared to 9 percent of admissions in 2005.

3. Though use of the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) is not mandatory, physicians make up nearly half of the total 9,141 PMP system user accounts. The PMP is used to monitor prescription drug use in an effort to promote public health and welfare by detecting diversion, abuse and misuse of certain controlled substances listed in Minnesota Statutes Chapter 152.

4. What to watch for! Those who are at high risk for prescription opioid abuse often:
- have a history of substance abuse or mental illness;
- take high daily doses of prescription opioids;
- obtain multiple prescriptions from multiple providers;
- are part of the low-income/Medicaid population; and
- use multiple substances with abuse potential (benzodiazepines, illicit drugs, etc.).

5. Seventy-six percent of non-medical users of prescription opioids report getting drugs that had been prescribed to someone else. Only 20 percent report that they acquired the drug from their own physician.

6. It is recommended that physicians perform substance abuse screenings, brief interventions and referrals to treatment for patients they suspect are abusing prescription opioids.

7. One best practice for appropriate opioid prescribing is to use patient-physician agreements or contracts, combined with urine drug tests for patients using prescription opioids long term.

8. Physicians should:
- continue to learn about addiction and pain management;
- start screening patients for substance abuse;
- develop an opiate overdose prevention strategy;
- always use the PMP; and
- talk to their patients about safely using, storing and disposing of prescription opioids.

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