Use of Opioids for Pain Management: Educating Patients and Providers on Upcoming Changes to Vermont State Law

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Use of opioids for pain management: Educating patients and providers on upcoming changes to Vermont state law

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Problem Identification & Description of Need

Vermont is suffering from an “opioid epidemic”
- 3 out of 4 people who used heroin in 2013 misused opioids first\(^1\)
- In 2016, there were 112 opioid-related fatalities in Vermont\(^2\)

Even when opioids are not being abused, chronic opioid use is associated with adverse health outcomes including\(^3\):
- Sleep disorders
- GI dysfunction
- Hyperalgesia
- Immunosuppression
- Osteoporosis/increased risk of fracture
- Tooth decay
- Overdose, death
- Doses >50 MME/day are associated with 2x increased risk of overdose than doses <20 MME\(^4\)
Public Health Cost

National economic cost of opioid abuse is high, especially in VT:

- In 2013, the estimated cost for opioid overdose, abuse, and dependence in the US was greater than **$78.5 billion**\(^5\)
  - This number includes health care costs, criminal justice costs, and loss of workplace productivity
  - This estimate is significantly increased from $55.7 billion in 2007\(^6\)

- In Vermont, the estimated cost for 2016 was >$84,000,000
  - This is also increased from an estimated $38,109,065 in 2007\(^7\)

The opioid epidemic also affects non-users:

- VT has the 2\(^{nd}\) highest rate of infants born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome after prenatal exposure to opioids\(^8\)
Community Perspective

Community perspective: **Benjamin Cavaretta, Berlin Police Department**

- **On the opioid epidemic...**
  - Overdose isn’t the only negative consequence of opioid addiction – almost all retail thefts, robberies, larcenies, and burglaries are committed by people trying to support their addiction
  - A large majority of current heroin abusers report that their addiction began with prescription medication
- **Thoughts on the upcoming change in legislation...**
  - Limiting the access to opioids is a step in the right direction
  - Hope that it will decrease the number of people becoming newly addicted to opioids
  - Some concern that decreased opioids in the community may cause a surge in heroin use

Provider perspective: **Dr. Dale Stafford, MD**

- **On the opioid epidemic...**
  - [The practice] has been seeing more patients with opiate abuse and overuse now more than ever
  - The epidemic has caused the practice to implement changes in workflow, such as monitoring the VPMS, urine drug screens, and seeing patients more often – this burdens providers, staff, and patients
- **Thoughts on the upcoming change in legislation...**
  - Hope that it will lead to fewer opioids in the community to be diverted and abused
  - Somewhat fearful of the pendulum swinging the other way, in which patients will be short-changed when they need meds, causing the burden to fall on us [primary care providers]
New legislation (effective 7/1/17) was created to address this crisis and promote safe prescribing practices.

To inform the both providers and patients about the upcoming changes, an information sheet was created.

- Given to patients on chronic opioids or requesting opioids for acute pain
- Given to providers to keep as a reference
Results/Response

Providers responded positively to the handout:

- Feel that it will be helpful in explaining new changes to patients during limited appointment times
  - Plan to keep forms in patient rooms for easy access
- Feel that it will also be beneficial for providers to have a quick reference for dosage limitations
Evaluation of Effectiveness & Limitations

Effectiveness:

◦ Patients can be provided with information sheet, and physicians can assess understanding at future follow-up visits
◦ Periodic reviews of the EMR to assess opioid prescribing trends over the next year

Limitations:

◦ Given the short time-course of the clerkship, I was not able to survey patients to assess their understanding of prescribing regulations and compare after handout distribution
◦ Additionally, there was not time to survey providers
◦ Handout was only distributed to patients being treated at Berlin Family Medicine
Recommendations for Future Interventions/Projects

Survey patients about their perspectives on opioids for pain management.
- Assess understanding of and perspective on the new legislation
- Assess understanding of the risks of chronic opioid use

Survey providers about implementation of new regulations.
- Assess how providers feel that new regulations have changed their practice, if at all
- Assess for push-back from the community, and how providers handle such situations

Create opioid smartlist for the EMR
- Create a simple checklist that can be filled in when opioids are to be prescribed
  - Will allow providers to ensure that requirements are being met and appropriately documented
References


