



KAREN L. SMITH, MD, MPH
 Director and State Public Health Officer

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
 Governor

**Statewide Prescription Opioid
 Misuse and Overdose Prevention
 Workgroup Member Agencies***

CA Public Employees'
 Retirement System – CalPERS

Covered California

CA Conference of Local Health
 Officers

CA Department of Corrections and
 Rehabilitation

CA Department of Justice

CA Department of Public Health

CA Health Care Foundation

County Health Executives
 Association of CA

CA Health and Human Services
 Agency

California Society of Addiction
 Medicine

CA State Board of Pharmacy

Dental Board of CA

Medical Board of CA

Department of Health Care
 Services

Department of Industrial Relations

Department of Managed Health
 Care

Department of Motor Vehicles

Emergency Medical Services
 Authority

Office of Statewide Health Planning
 and Development - OSHPD

Office of Traffic Safety

UC Davis Medical Center

US Drug Enforcement
 Administration

March 21, 2017

Dear Health Care Provider/Prescriber,

As you are aware, the overuse of prescription opioids has become a national epidemic. In California, there were 1,966 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2015. On behalf of the Statewide Prescription Opioid Misuse and Overdose Prevention Workgroup and partners, I am contacting you to offer resources to assist you in addressing this critical issue with your patients including:

- strategies for assisting high-risk patients
- medication-assisted treatment certification programs
- local addiction recovery services locator
- information about CURES (California’s prescription drug monitoring program)
- opioid prescribing guidelines
- opioid prescriber resource sheet

Please see the sections below for brief descriptions on each topic and a link to all resources at the bottom of this letter.

Don’t “Fire” Your Patients Who May Be Over-using Opioids

We recognize providing safe and effective pain management can be challenging. We understand there are multiple complexities to be considered in pain management when treating patients with acute and chronic pain. One of the most difficult situations for prescribers may be how to respond to patients with difficulty decreasing opioid intake or with other possible addiction symptoms. It is our hope that these resources can help you maintain your clinical relationship with your patients who are using opioid medications and improve their overall well-being. These patients may need your assistance more than ever.

Clinician Tools for Assisting Patients on Opioids

Patients on high doses of opioids are at increased risk of overdose and diminishing function. Tapering a patient, weaning them from higher opioid doses, can be an important first step to reducing overdose risk and improving function. It is also helpful to maintain ongoing communication with your patient about your concern for their wellbeing and your commitment to safe prescribing. A variety of tools are available on the prescriber resource sheet (link below) including a tapering pocket guide, telephone consultation services, an opioid overdose toolkit, and more.

*Agencies listed for information only



Medication-Assisted Treatment

When addiction is confirmed, the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT), such as buprenorphine has proven highly effective in lowering overdose risk, decreasing HIV and hepatitis C, and increasing patient retention in treatment. If you are not already certified to prescribe buprenorphine, consider obtaining a certification. There are several online MAT training programs available for prescribers.

Referral and Treatment Service Locators

If you are unable to provide medication assisted treatment yourself, refer patients to an opioid treatment program or other drug recovery program within your community. Access to more information about local addiction recovery services is readily available.

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program - CURES

An important tool for identifying patients at risk is the Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES). CURES can be accessed relatively easily, and checking CURES with each new patient, and every four months thereafter, will soon be required by law. In the next few months, the Medical Board of California will send additional information specifically about CURES and how to best utilize it.

Prescribing Guidelines for Opioids and Controlled Substance for Pain

Both the Medical Board of California (MBC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines provide information about best practices for prescribing opioids, options for non-pharmacological treatment of pain symptoms, along with recommendations for those patients presenting with symptoms of addiction. Abbreviated versions of these guidelines are also available.

To access the above mentioned resources and tools – please scan this QRC code below with your mobile device. It will quickly take you to a resource sheet for opioid prescribers with helpful links.



Healthcare prescribers are essential partners in ending this epidemic. Working together, we want to ensure that California prescribers have access to resources and support to help improve patient pain management, while avoiding opioid overdose and addiction. Thank you for providing quality medical care to your patients in need of effective pain management.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health