

Informed Consent for Using Opioids to Treat Pain

1. Using Opioid Medications To Treat Pain

- a. These medications are used to treat moderate-to-severe pain of any type
- b. These medications are best understood as potentially effective tools that can help reduce pain, improve function, and improve quality of life
- c. Using these medications requires that both the physician and patient work together in a responsible way to ensure the best outcome, lowest side effects, and least complications

2. Where Do Opioids work?

- a. Opioid medications work at the injury site, the spinal cord, and the brain
- b. They dampen pain, but do not treat the underlying injury
- c. They may help to prevent acute pain from becoming persistent chronic pain
- d. These medications may work differently on different people because of a number of factors determined by the individuals make up
- e. Side effects and complications will also individually vary

3. Effects of Opioids at the Site of the Injury

- a. When a person is injured the number of opioid receptors in the area of the injury rapidly increases making opioid medications more effective for treating pain
- b. When opioids are used under the circumstances of moderate-to-severe pain, much of their activity is directed to the site of the injury
- c. This may explain why opioids used to treat appropriate pain are less likely to cause mental side effects, such as euphoria
- d. Once the pain is under effective control, we can often use less medication to maintain pain control

4. Opioids Also Work in the Central Nervous System at the Spinal Cord and the Brain

- a. Probably the strongest effect of opioid medications is at the spinal cord, where they can decrease pain signals being sent toward the brain
- b. Opioids reduce pain at several sites of the brain to decrease the pain signal sent through the spinal cord from the injury site
- c. The brain sends its own signal to the spinal cord to further reduce the pain signal

5. What To Expect When You Take Opioid Medications for Pain

- a. Pain relief
- b. Reduction of stress caused by pain
- c. Side effects

6. What Should Not Be Expected From Treatment With Opioid Medications

- a. Cure of the underlying injury
- b. Total elimination of the pain
- c. Loss of ability to feel other physical pain

7. Negative Effects of Opioid Medications Vary in Different People

- a. Side effects
 - i. Common effects include constipation, dry mouth, sweating, nausea, drowsiness, euphoria, forgetfulness, difficulty urinating, itching
 - ii. Uncommon effects include confusion, hallucinations, shortness of breath, depression, lack of motivation
- b. Physical dependency
 - i. These medications will cause a physical dependency marked by an abstinence syndrome when they are stopped abruptly. If these medications are stopped or rapidly decreased the patient will experience chills, goose bumps, profuse sweating, increased pain, irritability, anxiety, agitation, and diarrhea. The medicines will not cause these symptoms if taken as prescribed and any decision to stop these medications should be done under the supervision of your physician in a slow downward taper
- c. Misuse of medications
 - i. Addiction: This is a psychological condition of use of a substance despite self-harm. Between six and ten percent of the population of the United States have problems with substance abuse and addiction. Opioid medications are likely to activate addictive behavior in this group of people
 - ii. Diversion: Often people who are addicts will try to get pain patients treated with opioids to give or sell their medications to them. It is essential to never share your opioid medications
- d. Driving
 - i. Studies of patients with chronic pain demonstrate improved driving skills when taking opioids, but individuals may have problems driving and need to realistically assess their own skills, as well as listen to others who drive with them to determine if they should be driving while taking these medications. It is also the responsibility of the prescribing physician to inform the Department of Motor Vehicles if he or she determines that the patient presents a risk as a driver

8. Common Sense Rules for Using Opioid Medications

- a. Follow your doctor's recommendations
- b. Do not take more or less pills than prescribed without discussing this first with your physician and receiving permission to do so
- c. Do not share medications with family or friends
- d. Do not take medications from family or friends

- e. Do not stop these medications abruptly. Dose reductions need to be discussed and cleared by your physician
- f. Do not sell medications
- g. Do not take medications in any manner other than prescribed. For example do not chew or inject medications
- h. Keep opioid medications out of reach of children
- i. Do not leave your prescriptions or opioid medications lying around unprotected for others to steal and abuse them
- j. Do not operate a motor vehicle if you feel mentally impaired using opioid medications. You are responsible for exhibiting good judgment
- k. Alcohol use should be curtailed when using these medications

9. Other Expectations for Using Opioid Medications

- a. Use one pharmacy and if you switch pharmacies let your physician's office know about the change
- b. If other physicians start other medications, inform the doctor who is treating your pain with opioid medications
- c. The prescribing doctor has permission to discuss your treatment with dispensing pharmacists and your other healthcare providers taking care of you
- d. Unannounced urine or blood screens may be ordered and your cooperation is expected. If unexpected substances are detected, referral for addiction treatment may be a requirement for ongoing treatment
- e. Your physician may require that you bring in your medications in their original bottles
- f. If medications are lost, destroyed or damaged, it is up to your doctor's discretion to replace these or not. It is highly unlikely that your insurance company will provide coverage for this
- g. If medications or written prescriptions are stolen a police report must be filed and a copy brought to the physician's office for these medications to be replaced
- h. Medications should be filled at the time of visits and will not be sent out by mail
- i. Early refills must be discussed with the prescribing physician and may not be refilled if the physician feels that this is inappropriate
- j. Confidentiality is waived for the following circumstances:
 - i. Police investigation into suspicion of illegal use, diversion, or distribution of opioid medications by the patient
 - ii. Dispensing pharmacist questions regarding treatment
 - iii. Emergency room treatment
 - iv. Ongoing treatment with other treating physicians requiring full knowledge of patient's medications

10. Consequences of Failure To Follow Policies

- a. Your physician may require a consultation with an addiction specialist
- b. Your physician may decide to discontinue treatment with controlled substances
- c. Your physician may require more frequent visits
- d. Your physician may cease all treatment

11. Ongoing Treatment with Opioid Medications

- a. Is based on the physician’s judgment of benefits outweighing problems
- b. The treating physician can discontinue the treatment at his or her discretion

12. Opioid Medications Are a Powerful and Often Highly Effective Tool in Treating Pain

- a. They also have serious side effects and are highly controlled because of their potential for misuse and abuse
- b. Used properly they can help restore comfort, function, and quality of life
- c. For patients with pain, working in concert with their physicians, opioid medications can be used safely and successfully

Patient Name _____

Patient Signature _____

Physician Signature _____

Date _____

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