

# Risk of Continued Opioid Use

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdose deaths continue to increase in the United States. From 1999 to 2017, more than 700,000 people died from a drug overdose. In 2017, of the more than 70,200 drug overdose deaths in 2017 involve an opioid, including prescription as well as illegal opioids like heroin and illicitly manufactured fentanyl. On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.<sup>1</sup>

Prescription opioids have contributed significantly to the overdose problem. Almost 218,000 Americans died from overdoses related to RX opioids from 1999 to 2017. To compound this is the fact that overdose deaths related to prescription opioids were 5 times higher in 2017 than in 1999.<sup>1</sup>

Among opioid naïve, cancer-free adults, prescribed opioid pain medication, data indicates the likelihood of chronic opioid use increased with each additional day of medication, with the sharpest increases after the 5<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> day on therapy.<sup>2</sup> While there is encouraging data showing that providers are becoming more cautious about prescribing practices - prescribing rates for opioids have declined (↓29%) from 2006 to 2019<sup>3</sup> - challenges remain to curb this epidemic further. In 2019, more than 168 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed to American patients.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics; 2017. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov>.

<sup>2</sup>Shah A, Hayes CJ, Martin BC. Characteristics of Initial Prescription Episodes and Likelihood of Long-Term Opioid Use — United States, 2006–2015. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2017; 66:265–269. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6610a1>

<sup>3</sup>Annual Surveillance Report of Drug-Related Risks and Outcomes, United States, 2019. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, @ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/pubs/2019-cdc-drug-surveillance-report.pdf>

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Create a process to identify those patients at risk for continued opioid use (opioid naïve patients)
- Only prescribe opioids when medically necessary, in the lowest effective dose, for the shortest duration necessary
- Consider the use of alternative pain management treatments, including NSAIDs, massage therapy, biofeedback, etc.
- Educate your patients to the risks of long term use of opioids
- Utilize Opioid Treatment Agreements which may reduce prescription opioid misuse while informing the patients of the risks

Note: Use of long term opioids may be appropriate for patients diagnosed with cancer and/or sickle cell anemia, as well as patients in Hospice

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain – United States 2016 @ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/guideline.html>

Calculating Total daily Dose of Opioids for Safer Dosage @ [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating\\_total\\_daily\\_dose-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating_total_daily_dose-a.pdf)

Agreement on Controlled Substances Therapy for Chronic Pain 2013 *American Academy of Pain Medicine* @ <https://painmed.org/uploads/education/agreement-on-controlled-substances-therapy.pdf>