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Provider Alert

To: Sharp Health Plan Providers and Provider Office Staff
From: Sharp Health Plan
Date: March 18, 2022
Subject: Information on Opioid Risks and Alternative Treatments

Dear Provider Partner:

This notice is to provide you with additional information related to opioid risks and alternative treatments. We hope that this information can serve as a resource to help guide any future discussions with your patients. We thank you for your continued commitment to providing the best care possible for our members.

Discussing the risk of long-term opioid use with your patients

Prescription opioids can be used to help relieve moderate-to-severe pain and are often prescribed following a surgery or injury, or for certain health conditions. While these medications can be an important part of treatment, they also carry serious risks of addiction, accidental overdose, and death. Long-term use of opioids can also lead to tolerance and physical dependence.

It is important that patients work with their health care provider to ensure they are getting the safest and most effective care. Discussing alternative options with your patients can help manage their pain with less long-term risks.

Discussing alternative treatment options for pain management with your patients

It is encouraged that primary care and prescribing providers discuss ways to manage pain without opioids, including options with fewer risks and side effects. Education on treatment choices and the risks will help a patient find safe and effective care for reaching their personal treatment goals.

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is the use of medications combined with counseling and behavioral therapies, which can help some people to sustain recovery. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved three drugs to treat opioid dependence: buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone. These treatments have shown to be safe and effective when paired with counseling and psychosocial support. Other examples of alternative non-opioid treatments include:

- Over-the-counter medications, e.g., acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), naproxen (Aleve)
- Non-opioid prescriptions, e.g., non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS)
- Acupuncture, physical therapy, and exercise
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Some medications that are also used for depression or seizures



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Protecting your patients against overdose risk when long-term opioid use is unavoidable

As a provider we encourage you to have a discussion with your patients about getting a prescription for naloxone. Naloxone is a prescription drug that can be given during an opioid overdose and may reverse the effects. In case of an opioid overdose, this rescue agent could save a patient's life and give some peace of mind for them and their family members to have available.

Additional resources for your patients

Members can go online to visit the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' pain management website at [medicare.gov/coverage/pain-management](https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/pain-management) for information on Medicare coverage of pain management. Additional information related to state and federal public health resources on safe opioid use can be found in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' opioid website at [hhs.gov/opioids](https://www.hhs.gov/opioids).

Sincerely,

Sharp Health Plan

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