

Opioid prescribing for Acute Pain

Quality Standards

Health Quality Ontario, the provincial advisor on the quality of health care, has released a quality standard offering guidance on prescribing opioids to treat people with acute pain.

Below is a summary of the quality standard:

1. Comprehensive Assessment

People with acute pain receive a comprehensive assessment to guide pain management.

2. Multimodal Therapies

People with acute pain receive multimodal therapy consisting of non-opioid pharmacotherapy with physical and/or psychological interventions, with opioids added only when appropriate.

3. Opioid Dose and Duration

People with acute pain who are prescribed opioids receive the lowest effective dose of the least potent immediate-release opioid. A duration of 3 days or less is often sufficient. A duration of more than 7 days is rarely indicated.

4. Information on Benefits and Harms of Opioid Use and Shared Decision-Making

People with acute pain and their families and caregivers receive information about the potential benefits and harms of opioid therapy, safe storage, and safe disposal of unused medication at the times of both prescribing and dispensing.

5. Acute Pain in People Who Regularly Take Opioids

People with acute pain who regularly take opioids receive care from a health care professional or team with expertise in pain management. Any short-term increase in opioids to treat acute pain is accompanied by a plan to taper to the previous dose.

6. Acute Pain in People With Opioid Use Disorder

People taking buprenorphine/naloxone or methadone for the treatment of opioid use disorder continue their medication during acute-pain events.

7. Prescription Monitoring Systems

Health care professionals who prescribe or dispense opioids have access to a real-time prescription monitoring system at the point of care. Prescription history is checked when opioids are prescribed and dispensed to avoid duplicate prescriptions, potentially harmful medication interactions, and diversion.

8. Tapering and Discontinuation

People prescribed opioids for acute pain are aware of the potential for experiencing physical dependence and symptoms of withdrawal and have a plan for tapering and discontinuation.

9. Health Care Professional Education

Health care professionals have the knowledge and skills to appropriately assess and treat acute pain using a multimodal approach; appropriately prescribe, monitor, taper, and discontinue opioids; and recognize and treat opioid use disorder.

To see the complete quality standard and accompanying guide for patients, visit:

[HQOntario.ca/OpioidPrescribingAcute](https://www.hqontario.ca/OpioidPrescribingAcute)

What are quality standards?

Quality standards outline what high-quality care looks like for conditions and topics where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or gaps between the care provided and the care patients should receive. They are based on the best available evidence and are created in partnership with patients and health care professionals.

They are intended to:

- Help patients know what to ask for in their care
- Help health care professionals know what care they should be offering

- Help organizations improve the quality of care they provide
- Help health system planners make decisions regionally and system-wide that support the implementation of evidence-based health care

How are quality standards different from other standards and guidelines?

Quality standards are concise statements designed to help health professionals easily and quickly know what care to provide, based on the best available evidence. They include a patient guide to help patients, their families and informal caregivers know what to discuss about their care with their health care professionals.

Health Quality Ontario

Let's make our health system healthier

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