

Opioid Position Statement

Introduction

Despite the many efforts of governments, organizations and individuals, the opioid crisis persists and continues to need health-system-wide solutions and collaboration amongst government agencies, health-care educators, regulators, physicians and other health professionals to ensure patient well-being and public safety.

There are many contributing factors – socioeconomic, the availability of illicit drugs that are increasingly unsafe, and a lack of sufficient services to support chronic pain, mental health and addiction. Well-meaning prescribing by physicians has also contributed to the problem, and improvements to prescribing practices must be part of the solution.

This statement communicates the College's role and approach to continue to provide important information and resources to help physicians prescribe safely and appropriately. Physicians are strongly encouraged to read the College's updated Prescribing Drugs policy, which reflects the 2017 Canadian Guideline for Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain.

The College's Role and Approach: OUR OPIOID STRATEGY

The College's Opioid Strategy comprises a four-pronged approach reflecting our mandate, namely to: Guide; Assess; Communicate; and Respond. The strategy reflects a change in focus from investigations to the promotion of quality improvement (e.g., physician access to their own prescribing data and educational resources). The CPSO will continue to respond to prescribing concerns using a remediation approach as appropriate.

The objectives of the revised opioid strategy are to:

- ▶ Promote safe and appropriate prescribing via assessments and quality improvement
- ▶ Respond to inappropriate opioid prescribing

Key College activities and elements of our Opioid Strategy which promote appropriate opioid prescribing include:

[Guide](#)

Prescribing drugs is a standard component of most physicians' practices. It is an important area of practice that requires appropriate knowledge, skill and professional judgment. Prescribing is also governed by a complex legislative framework. The College provides guidance and sets expectations of physicians in our Prescribing Drugs policy.

The College is collaborating with partners to help ensure that physicians receive the education, training and resources they need to appropriately prescribe opioids.

Our role is to identify and connect physicians with opioid prescribing learning needs to educational resources to improve their prescribing practices. The College initially supported the development of the University of Toronto's Safer Opioid Prescribing Program and continues to support updates to the program. As new or updated resources become available, we will share that information with members and make it available online when possible.

Assess

The College assesses physicians in their family medicine and other specialty practices to ensure that they are meeting the current standards of practice. Peer assessments have always looked at prescribing practices when applicable, and will include a new emphasis on opioid prescribing. We are also exploring an alternative approach to responding to potentially moderate-risk prescribing by conducting focused assessments. Our goal is to support continued prescribing when it is appropriate and informed by both clinical guidelines and College policy.

We also conduct regular assessments of physicians who prescribe methadone for the treatment of opioid dependence.

Communicate

Communication is a key element of the revised strategy. The College will continue to promote best practices for opioid prescribing and provide relevant and easily accessible resources to physicians to improve practice. The College will also advocate to government for all physicians to have real time access to patient medication histories; access for all physicians to comparative prescribing data like MyPractice reports and the establishment of a provincial prescription monitoring program.

We are also committed to communicating with patients to ensure they have accurate and helpful information about opioids and their options if they have concerns or questions about physician prescribing.

Respond

The College will continue to respond to opioid prescribing concerns although we are moving from proactive identification (seeking prescribing information via NMS data) to responding to prescribing concerns raised by others. We will also continue to try to address concerns that are identified through remediation.

Looking Forward

Through our revised opioid strategy, the College has identified and committed to a specific plan of action within its own area of responsibility of medical regulation. Prescribing opioids under the right conditions is critical for good patient care. Our goal is to ensure that physicians have the resources and information they need to appropriately prescribe opioids to their patients.