

The CPSO OPIOID STRATEGY

For Patients: Frequently Asked Questions

1. My physician says she will no longer write me prescriptions for opioids because she'll get in trouble with the CPSO. Why are you preventing my physician from prescribing the opioids I need?

When prescribed properly, opioids can be critical for good patient care. **We are not asking physicians to stop prescribing opioids but to prescribe responsibly and in line with best practices.** We have also told physicians that it is never appropriate to abandon a patient on long-term opioid therapy or to abruptly cut off or threaten to cut off a patient's medication.

The 2017 Canadian Guideline for Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain urges doctors to take a much more conservative approach to prescribing opioids. The guideline recommends trying non-opioid approaches to treatment first, and when opioids are considered of potential benefit to a patient, smaller amounts should be prescribed.

As the regulator of Ontario's physicians, we are mandated to serve and protect the public and that includes ensuring physicians prescribe appropriately. We recognize that well-meaning overprescribing has contributed to the opioid problem, and improvements to prescribing practices must be part of the solution.

Please read our [Message to Patients Living with Chronic Non-Cancer Pain](#) for more information or visit our [opioid information web page](#).

2. My physician is lowering my opioid dose and it is no longer effective. How can I get access to appropriate care?

If you are already taking prescription opioid for chronic pain, we encourage you to discuss your treatment with your doctor to make sure your medication and dose are still appropriate.

We expect physicians to be aware of and follow relevant clinical practice guidelines when appropriate. Decisions about prescribing opioids are always a matter of a doctor's individual professional judgment in consultation with patients who are fully informed of the risks and benefits of opioid therapy.

It is never appropriate to abandon a patient on long-term opioid therapy or abruptly cut off or threaten to cut off a patient's medication. Safely reducing long-term opioid medication, where clinically indicated, requires a thoughtful plan of care between both you and your doctor. If you have concerns about reducing your opioid medication, speak with your doctor, or contact the College's Public Advisory Service at 1-800-268-7096 ext. 603.

3. I suffer from chronic pain and my doctor has recommended that I use opioids, but I'm worried about becoming addicted. How can I tell if my doctor is prescribing me too much?

If your doctor is recommending opioid treatment, it is important that you get information to help you decide whether this therapy is right for you. Patients considering opioid therapy should have a conversation with their physician about the risks and benefits of the medication, including the risk of addiction and overdose.

A video series developed by SafeMedicationUse.ca called Question Opioids is aimed at patients who have not started opioid medications, to empower patients with important information so an informed decision can be made about starting opioids.

4. I heard you are investigating a lot of doctors for inappropriately prescribing opioids.

Over the past two years, we conducted 84 investigations into the prescribing practices of physicians based on information received from the Narcotics Monitoring System. Those investigations are complete and we are not seeking further information this way. Of the 84 investigations, the majority resulted in the doctor requiring some remediation. Twenty-two investigations resulted in no further action and 2 doctors were referred to the Discipline Committee. It was our goal to take a remedial approach, whenever appropriate, to help physicians improve their prescribing practices and stay in practice.

Our revised strategy includes a change in focus from investigations to the promotion of quality improvement. We will continue to respond to prescribing concerns that come to our attention using a remediation approach where possible.

5. I can't find a doctor willing to take me into their practice because I'm on opioids. Can you help me to find a doctor?

While the CPSO does not have a physician referral service, we can provide advice on locating a new physician. Please call our Public Advisory Service at 1-800-268-7096 ext. 603.