

Aberrant Drug Taking Behaviors Information Sheet

Introduction

This information sheet provides examples of patient behaviors that may indicate prescription medication abuse or addiction and behaviors that may appear aberrant but are likely to be part of the normal process of stabilizing a patient's pain condition. This resource is based on the research literature and can be used to guide clinicians who are treating and monitoring patients receiving prescription opioid therapy for long-term pain management.

Aberrant Drug Taking Behaviors

Adapted from:

Portenoy RK. Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 1996; 11:203-217

Manchikanti L. Pain Physician 2008; Opioids Special Issue: 11:S155-180

Behaviors more likely to be associated with medication abuse/addiction:

- Selling medications or obtaining them from non-medical sources
- Falsification of prescription—forgery or alteration
- Injecting medications meant for oral use; oral or IV use of transdermal patches
- Resistance to changing medications despite deterioration in function or significant negative effects
- Loss of control over alcohol use
- Use of illegal drugs or controlled substances that are not prescribed for the patient
- Recurrent episodes of
 - Prescription loss or theft
 - Obtaining opioids from other providers in violation of treatment agreement
 - Increases in dosing without provider's instruction
 - Running short with medication supply, and requests for early refills

Behaviors that look aberrant but may be more a part of stabilizing a patient's pain condition, and less predictive of medication abuse/addiction

- Asking for, or even demanding, more medication
- Asking for specific medications
- Stockpiling medications during times when pain is less severe
- Use of the pain medications during times when pain is less severe
- Use of the pain medication to treat other symptoms
- Reluctance to decrease opioid dosing once stable
- And, in the earlier stages of treatment:
 - Increasing medication dosing without instruction to do so from the provider
 - Obtaining prescriptions from sources other than the primary pain provider
 - Sharing or borrowing similar medications from friends/family