



## Options Abound to Tackle Pain Without Opioids *By Samantha Murphy, PA-C*

Across the world, pain is one of the most common reasons to seek medical attention. For some people, pain may be fleeting, while others experience chronic pain spanning decades. There are several medications used to treat pain, chief among them are opioids.

Opioid medications (ie. Hydrocodone, Oxycodone, Morphine, Codeine, and Fentanyl) have gained national attention in the last few years due to the increasing amount of prescription drug abuse and opioid related deaths. Learning about how these medications affect the body is the first step in understanding the gravity of this situation.

Opioids are naturally occurring in the body. Opioid receptors are present in the brain, spinal cord, GI tract, and several other organs. Opioids attach to these receptors preventing the transmission of pain signals. They also act on the reward pathway of the brain creating euphoria, or a “high.” When naturally occurring opioids are not enough to stop severe or chronic pain, synthetic

opioids may be prescribed. However, these medications are not benign. Side effects range from constipation and nausea to sedation, confusion, and even respiratory depression resulting in death. Most concerning, synthetic opioids have the potential to create physiologic changes in the body leading to abuse and dependence.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids has nearly quadrupled since 1999. Approximately ninety-one Americans die every day from opioid overdose. It has become an epidemic, and the solution begins with safer prescribing practices.

The CDC created guidelines to help clinicians manage chronic pain targeting safety and effectiveness of opioid therapy. These guidelines and regulations encourage providers to use non-opioid medications as first line (ie NSAIDs, Tylenol, and topical analgesics/anesthetics) before progressing to opioids. Other options

including chiropractic medicine, physical therapy, massage therapy, meditation, ultrasound, or joint injections can also be effective ways to manage pain.

The CDC guidelines also aim to improve communication between providers and patients weighing the risks and benefits of opioid therapy for treatment of chronic pain. The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PMP) is a state-run database that allows providers to track the dispensing and prescribing of controlled medications. Pharmacist and providers can identify patients at risk for potential abuse.

Overall, when used appropriately opioids can be effective in treating acute and chronic pain. However, the recent increase in opioid abuse has demonstrated a need for stricter regulations to combat this growing epidemic. We encourage anyone with questions about pain relief in general and opioid use specifically to speak with their provider.

## Giving Feet the Care They Deserve

If you’ve been ignoring foot aggravations thinking they are too minor to mention, know that John Tassone, DPM, enjoys caring for ALL types of concerns: persistent foot and ankle pain, non-healing wounds from the knee to the toes as well as foot cracking, scaling and blistering. Dr. Tassone also provides routine diabetic foot care and specializes in biomechanics, wound care and diabetic peripheral neuropathy. “People are often hesitant to come in for something they consider minor such as an ingrown toenail, unexplained toenail changes or persistent foot pain,” he said. “But my patients know that I am passionate about keeping them mobile and their feet healthy. There really isn’t anything too minor to address.”

Schedule online with Dr. Tassone or call 602-938-6960.

### LOCATIONS

Thunderbird Internal Medicine – Glendale  
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