Ohio Guideline for the Management of Acute Pain Outside of Emergency Departments

Preface: This guideline provides a general approach to the outpatient management of acute pain. It is not intended to take the place of clinician judgement, which should always be utilized to provide the most appropriate care to meet the unique needs of each patient. This guideline is the result of the work from the Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT) and the workgroup on Opioids and Other Controlled Substances (OOCS).

Introduction

In 2014, 2,482 individuals in Ohio died from an unintentional opioid-related overdose – more than a four-fold increase in 10 years[1]. Unintentional opioid overdose has become one of the leading causes of injury-related death in Ohio over the past decade. To respond to this challenge, public health and health care leaders have committed to helping healthcare providers better serve their patients with pain, while reducing the potential for overdose and death. As part of the Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT), the workgroup on Opioids and Other Controlled Substances (OOCS) was charged with developing guidelines for the safe, appropriate and effective prescribing of self-administered medications for pain. The two previously released guidelines are:

- Ohio Emergency and Acute Care Facility Opioids and Other Controlled Substances Prescribing Guidelines [Released 2012; Revised 2014]
- Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids for the Treatment of Chronic, Non-Terminal Pain 80mg of a Morphine Equivalent Dose (MED) "Trigger Point" [Released 2013]

Purpose

This third guideline is focused on the management of acute pain and the prescribing of self-administered medications for acute pain, delineating a standardized process that includes **key checkpoints** for the clinician to pause and take additional factors into consideration.

Definition of Acute Pain

For this guideline, acute pain is defined as pain that normally fades with healing, is related to tissue damage and significantly alters a patient's typical function. Acute pain is expected to resolve within days to weeks; pain present at 12 weeks is considered chronic and should be treated accordingly. This guideline may not apply to acute pain resulting from exacerbations of underlying chronic conditions.

Assessment and Diagnosis of Patient Presenting with Pain

For assessing patients presenting with acute pain, in addition to a proper medical history and physical exam, initial considerations should include:

- Location, intensity and severity of the pain and associated symptoms
- Quality of pain e.g. somatic (sharp or stabbing), visceral (ache or pressure) and neuropathic pain (burning, tingling or radiating)[2]
- Psychological factors, including personal and/or family history of substance use disorder

A specific diagnosis should be made, when appropriate, to facilitate the use of an evidence-based approach to treatment.

Develop a Plan

Upon determining the symptoms fit the definition of acute pain, both the provider and patient should discuss the risks/benefits of both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic therapy. The provider should educate and develop a treatment plan together with the patient that includes[3]:

- Measureable goals for the reduction of pain
- Use of both non-pharmacologic and pharmacologic therapies, with a clear path for progression of treatment
- Mutually understood expectations for the degree and the duration of the pain during therapy
- **Goal: Improvement of function to baseline or pre-injury status as opposed to complete resolution of pain**

Treatment of Acute Pain

While these guidelines provide a pathway for the management of acute pain, not every patient will need each option and care should be individualized.

Non-Pharmacologic Treatment

Non-pharmacologic therapies should be considered as first-line therapy for acute pain unless the natural history of the cause of pain or clinical judgment warrants a different approach. These therapies often reduce pain with fewer side effects and can be used in combination with non-opioid medications to increase likelihood of success. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Ice, heat, positioning, bracing, wrapping, splints, stretching and directed exercise often available through physical therapy
- Massage therapy, tactile stimulation, acupuncture/acupressure, chiropractic adjustment, manipulation, and osteopathic neuromuscular care
- Biofeedback and hypnotherapy

Non-Opioid Pharmacologic Treatment

Non-opioid medications should be used with non-pharmacologic therapy. When initiating pharmacologic therapy, patients should be informed on proper use of medication, importance of maintaining other therapies and expectation for duration and degree of symptom improvement. Treatment options, by the quality of pain, are listed below.

Somatic Pain

- Acetaminophen
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS)
- Corticosteroids

Alternatives include the following: gabapentin/pregabalin, skeletal muscle relaxants, serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and tricyclic antidepressants.

Visceral Pain

- Acetaminophen
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS)
- Corticosteroids

Alternatives include the following: dicyclomine, skeletal muscle relaxants, serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, topical anesthetics and tricyclic antidepressants.

Neuropathic Pain

- Gabapentin/pregabalin
- Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors
- Tricyclic antidepressants

Alternatives include the following: other antiepileptics, baclofen, bupropion, low-concentration capsaicin, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and topical lidocaine.

Opioid Pharmacologic Treatment

In general, reserve opioids for acute pain resulting from severe injuries or medical conditions, surgical procedures, or when alternatives (non-opioid options) are ineffective or contraindicated. Short-term opioid therapy may be preferred as a first line therapy in specific circumstances such as the immediate post-operative period. In most cases, opioids should be used as adjuncts to additional therapies, rather than alone.[4] It is critical that healthcare providers communicate with one another about a patient's care if the patient may be receiving opiate prescriptions from more than one provider to ensure optimum and appropriate pain management. The following are recommendations for the general use of opioids to manage acute pain:

- Appropriate risk screening should be completed (e.g. age, pregnancy, high-risk psychosocial environment, personal or family history of substance use disorder).
- Provide the patient with the least potent opioid to effectively manage pain. A morphine equivalence chart should be used if needed.
- Prescribe the minimum quantity needed with no refills based on each individual patient, rather than a default number of pills.
- Consider checking Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) for all patients who will receive an opiate prescription. (Note: An OARRS report is required for most prescriptions of seven days or more.)
- Avoid long-acting opioids (e.g. methadone, oxycodone ER, fentanyl).
- Use caution with prescribing opioids with patients on medications causing central nervous system depression (e.g. benzodiazepines and sedative hypnotics) or patients known to use alcohol, as combinations can increase the risk of respiratory depression and death.
- Discuss with the patient a planned wean off opioid therapy, concomitant with reduction or resolution of pain.
- Discuss proper secure storage and disposal of unused medication to reduce risks to the patient and others.
- Remind the patient that it is both unsafe and unlawful to give away or sell opioid medication, including unused or leftover medication.

Pain Reevaluation

Key Checkpoint: Reevaluation of patients who receive opioid therapy for acute pain will be considered if opioid therapy will continue beyond 14 days. This reevaluation may be through an office visit or phone call based on the discretion of the provider.

For patients with persisting pain, providers should reevaluate the initial diagnosis and consider the following:

- Pain characteristics (consider using a standardized tool [e.g. Oswestry Disability Index])
- Treatment methods used
- Reason(s) for continued pain
- Additional management options, including consultation with a specialist

Additional Checkpoint:

For patients with pain unresolved after 6 weeks, providers should repeat an assessment and determine whether treatment should be adjusted. Referral to guidelines on chronic pain management may be helpful at this point, although chronic pain is defined as pain persisting for longer than 12 weeks.

References:

1. ODH, Office of Vital Statistics, Analysis by Injury Prevention Program. 2013.
2. Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement. Assessment and management of acute pain. Bloomington (MN): Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement; 2008 Mar. 58p.
3. Massachusetts Medical Society Opioid Therapy and Physician Communication Guidelines. May 21, 2015.
4. Washington State Agency Medical Directors Group. Interagency Guideline on Prescribing Opiates for Pain Washington State Guidance. June 2015.