

## Opioid management: Addressing the gap in understanding, education, and practice

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As Editor-in-Chief, I'd like to welcome readers to this first issue of *Journal of Opioid Management*. The mission of the Journal is to promote the adequate and safe use of opioids in the treatment of pain as well as to educate readers on the legal and regulatory issues surrounding abuse, addiction, and prescription practices.

There is a clear need for education in the use and abuse of opioids in clinical practice. Since I practice in a large academic environment, I see this need on a daily basis. House staff are often confused on the starting doses of opioids, management of side effects, and pain management in general. Although medical students have taken a course in pharmacology, they have difficulty applying what they've learned at the bedside, and the subject is far too broad to cover adequately in the classroom.

The same can be said of the nursing students and staff. There is a wide chasm between physician and nurse understanding of opioid use and pain management in general. Hopefully, *Journal of Opioid Management* can close this gap.

Pain often is inadequately treated because of reluctance to prescribe opioid analgesics and fear that they will be abused. Many physicians have the perception that patients want more pain medication than they're comfortable prescribing. The difference between tolerance, physical dependence, and addiction is frequently misunderstood.

The belief that the use of opioids for pain relief causes addiction is a common clinical misconception; in reality, the most common cause of escalating pain is worsening disease, not an increased tolerance to pain medication. Pseudo-addiction (drug-seeking behavior) is caused by inadequate analgesic prescribing. In pseudo-addiction, the drug-seeking behavior stops when adequate medication dosages are given. Conversely, in true addiction, drug-seeking behavior continues to escalate.

Patient fears of opioid dependence are an additional hindrance to adequate pain management. Many patients are concerned about becoming addicted to opioids. In fact, compared with the abuse of other drugs, illicit drugs in particular, the abuse of opioid analgesics appears to be relatively low.<sup>1</sup>

The key challenges surrounding opioid management that will be addressed in the Journal are:

- recognizing and managing drug-seeking behavior and drug diversion;
- ethical issues, such as the double effect and its meaning in pain control;
- new technologies, such as implantable opioid devices for continuous intraspinal delivery;
- the perspective of patients and their expectations for pain control;
- recent efforts to liberalize opioid use for treatment of chronic nonmalignant pain;
- common prescribing errors and how to avoid them;
- legal issues and the ongoing regulatory environment; and
- addressing addiction issues in healthcare providers.

Recent research promises new treatment approaches, including opioid analgesics acting outside the central nervous system, targeting of opioid peptide-containing immune cells to peripheral damaged tissue, and gene transfer to enhance opioid production at sites of injury. Although these advances are exciting, there is still a ways to go.

Original articles, case studies, literature reviews, editorials, and letters concerning all aspects of opioid management will be considered. Articles selected for publication are vetted by a distinguished editorial board, who bring a broad range of knowledge and experience to the publication. Together, we look forward to making *Journal of Opioid Management* an invaluable resource in furthering pain management through adequate opioid research and practice.

### REFERENCE

1. Joranson DE, Ryan KM, Gilson AM, et al.: Trends in medical use and abuse of opioid analgesics. *JAMA*. 2000; 283(13): 1710-1714.