

Press Release

The Board of Medicine (Board) recognizes that misuse of and addiction to opioids is a serious and challenging public health problem. The Board also recognizes that principles of quality medical practice dictate that the people of New Hampshire have access to appropriate and effective pain treatment. Controlled substances, including opioid analgesics may, at times, be an essential component of this treatment. The medical management of pain should be based on the most current knowledge and research, and with an understanding of the unique risks associated with opioids. The Board is committed to implementing opioid prescribing rules that will allow licensees to provide the best possible care to patients while preventing the diversion of drugs for illegitimate purposes. The Board agrees with Governor Hassan that New Hampshire practitioners need appropriate tools to combat the public health crisis facing New Hampshire.

Today the Board took steps to revise its rules in order to ensure patients and providers are knowledgeable about the risks of opioid use and acceptable prescribing practices. The Board voted to adopt specific emergency rules.

The Board also laid out its plan for working with stakeholders and the public to facilitate permanent rules. These permanent rules will address best practices for prescribing opioids and pain management for both acute and non-cancerous chronic pain. The Board and a newly formed working group will meet to develop more permanent rules that address the concepts put forth by the Governor's draft proposal. It is anticipated that after public input the rules will be effective in April 2016. The rule-making schedule will be placed on our website by November 10.

The Board recognizes that reversing the trend of opioid misuse and abuse requires coordinated efforts to increase public awareness, take-back events for safe disposal, and addiction treatment and recovery options. The Board further recognizes that decreasing opioid misuse and abuse should be addressed by collaborative and constructive policies aimed at improving prescriber education and practice, decreasing diversion, and establishing the same protocols for all opioid prescribers.

While the Board declined to adopt the draft proposal as emergency rules, it nonetheless recognized the need for immediate change. After lengthy discussion and public comment, the Board voted to adopt specific emergency provisions. These amended provisions will go into effect on November 6, 2015. Resources to assist licensees in understanding and complying with these new requirements will be available on the Board's website. Additionally the Board will take action to expeditiously notify licensees of these emergency measures.

The emergency rules require the following:

- Adherence to the guidelines in the Federation of State Medical Boards Model Policy on the Use of Opioid Analgesics in the Treatment of Chronic Pain, July 2013. This document is available on the Board's website.

- The use of an informed consent for chronic pain patients.
- The use of a risk assessment tool for chronic pain patients. A sample assessment can be found on our website.
- The provision of educational information to acute pain patients which includes instruction on proper disposal of unused opioids.

The new emergency rules also mandate a written pain agreement and toxicology screening for all chronic pain patients receiving opioids.

The Board recognizes that use of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (“PDMP”) is critical in the treatment of pain. Prescribers are urged to use this potentially life-saving tool. The Board anticipates that some form of mandatory use of the PDMP will be included in the regular rulemaking process. Providers are asked to share their PDMP feedback with the Board over the coming months. Comments can be submitted to the Board by e-mailing Sarah.Blodgett@nh.gov.

Prescribers are also urged to use a morphine equivalent dose calculator as part of their pain treatment. This tool will be available on the Board’s website. Prescribers should be aware that a higher daily dose of opioids is associated with increases in opioid related mortality. Prescribers should use extra caution when prescribing opioids in excess of 100 mg MED.

Prescribers should also use extreme caution in prescribing opioids to patients who are taking Benzodiazepines. The combination of these drugs is another risk factor for increased opioid related mortality.

The Board appreciates the assistance of the Governor’s Office and the Department of Justice and is committed to working with stakeholders and the public to improve opioid prescribing practices in our state. The Board is likewise committed to fulfilling its mission to protect all citizens of New Hampshire by implementing rulemaking founded upon best science and evidence based practice and allows for public scrutiny.

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