

**TITLE 246. HEALTH, DEPARTMENT OF
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND LICENSING
CHAPTER 919. MEDICAL QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMISSION
PAIN MANAGEMENT**

WAC 246-919-850. Pain management -- Intent.

These rules govern the use of opioids in the treatment of patients for chronic noncancer pain.

The Washington state medical quality assurance commission (commission) recognizes that principles of quality medical practice dictate that the people of the state of Washington have access to appropriate and effective pain relief. The appropriate application of up-to-date knowledge and treatment modalities can serve to improve the quality of life for those patients who suffer from pain as well as reduce the morbidity and costs associated with untreated or inappropriately treated pain. For the purposes of this rule, the inappropriate treatment of pain includes nontreatment, undertreatment, overtreatment, and the continued use of ineffective treatments.

The diagnosis and treatment of pain is integral to the practice of medicine. The commission encourages physicians to view pain management as a part of quality medical practice for all patients with pain, acute or chronic, and it is especially urgent for patients who experience pain as a result of terminal illness. All physicians should become knowledgeable about assessing patients' pain and effective methods of pain treatment, as well as statutory requirements for prescribing controlled substances. Accordingly, this rule has been developed to clarify the commission's position on pain control, particularly as related to the use of controlled substances, to alleviate physician uncertainty and to encourage better pain management.

Inappropriate pain treatment may result from a physician's lack of knowledge about pain management. Fears of investigation or sanction by federal, state, and local agencies may also result in inappropriate treatment of pain. Appropriate pain management is the treating physician's responsibility. As such, the commission will consider the inappropriate treatment of pain to be a departure from standards of practice and will investigate such allegations, recognizing that some types of pain cannot be completely relieved, and taking into account whether the treatment is appropriate for the diagnosis.

The commission recognizes that controlled substances including opioid analgesics may be essential in the treatment of acute pain due to trauma or surgery and chronic pain, whether due to cancer or noncancer origins. The commission will refer to current clinical practice guidelines and expert review in approaching cases involving management of pain. The medical management of pain should consider current clinical knowledge and scientific research and the use of pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic modalities according to the judgment of the physician. Pain should be assessed and treated promptly, and the quantity and frequency of doses should be adjusted according to the intensity, duration of the pain, and treatment outcomes. Physicians should recognize that tolerance and physical dependence are normal consequences of sustained use of opioid analgesics and are not the same as addiction.

The commission is obligated under the laws of the state of Washington to protect the public health and safety. The commission recognizes that the use of opioid analgesics for other than legitimate medical purposes poses a threat to the individual and society and that the inappropriate prescribing of controlled substances, including opioid analgesics, may lead to drug diversion and abuse by individuals who seek them for other than legitimate medical use. Accordingly, the commission expects that physicians incorporate safeguards into their practices to minimize the potential for the abuse and diversion of controlled substances.

Physicians should not fear disciplinary action from the commission for ordering, prescribing, dispensing or administering controlled substances, including opioid analgesics, for a legitimate medical purpose and in the course of professional practice. The commission will consider prescribing, ordering, dispensing or administering controlled substances for pain to be for a legitimate medical purpose if based on sound clinical judgment. All such prescribing must be based on clear documentation of unrelieved pain. To be within the usual course of professional practice, a physician-patient relationship must exist and the prescribing should be based on a diagnosis and documentation of unrelieved pain. Compliance with applicable state or federal law is required.

The commission will judge the validity of the physician's treatment of the patient based on available documentation, rather than solely on the quantity and duration of medication administration. The goal is to control the patient's pain while effectively addressing other aspects of the patient's functioning, including physical, psychological, social, and work-related factors.

These rules are designed to assist practitioners in providing appropriate medical care for patients. They are not inflexible rules or rigid practice requirements and are not intended, nor should they be used, to establish a legal standard of care outside the context of the medical quality assurance committee's jurisdiction.

The ultimate judgment regarding the propriety of any specific procedure or course of action must be made by the practitioner based on all the circumstances presented. Thus, an approach that differs from the rules, standing alone, does not necessarily imply that the approach was below the standard of care. To the contrary, a conscientious practitioner may responsibly adopt a course of action different from that set forth in the rules when, in the reasonable judgment of the practitioner, such course of action is indicated by the condition of the patient, limitations of available resources, or advances in knowledge or technology subsequent to publication of these rules. However, a practitioner who employs an approach substantially different from these rules is advised to document in the patient record information sufficient to justify the approach taken.

The practice of medicine involves not only the science, but also the art of dealing with the prevention, diagnosis, alleviation, and treatment of disease. The variety and complexity of human conditions make it impossible to always reach the most appropriate diagnosis or to predict with certainty a particular response to treatment.

Therefore, it should be recognized that adherence to these rules will not assure an accurate diagnosis or a successful outcome. The sole purpose of these rules is to assist practitioners in following a reasonable course of action based on current knowledge, available resources, and the needs of the patient to deliver effective and safe medical care.

WAC 246-919-851. Exclusions.

The rules adopted under *WAC 246-919-850* through *246-919-863* do not apply:

- (1) To the provision of palliative, hospice, or other end-of-life care; or
- (2) To the management of acute pain caused by an injury or surgical procedure.

WAC 246-919-852. Definitions.

The definitions in *WAC 246-919-850* through *246-919-863* apply unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Acute pain" means the normal, predicted physiological response to a noxious chemical, thermal, or mechanical stimulus and typically is associated with invasive procedures, trauma, and disease. It is generally time-limited, often less than three months in duration, and usually less than six months.

(2) "Addiction" means a primary, chronic, neurobiologic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. It is characterized by behaviors that include:

- (a) Impaired control over drug use;
- (b) Craving;
- (c) Compulsive use; or
- (d) Continued use despite harm.

(3) "Chronic noncancer pain" means a state in which noncancer pain persists beyond the usual course of an acute disease or healing of an injury, or that may or may not be associated with an acute or chronic pathologic process that causes continuous or intermittent pain over months or years.

(4) "Comorbidity" means a preexisting or coexisting physical or psychiatric disease or condition.

(5) "Episodic care" means medical care provided by a practitioner other than the designated primary care practitioner in the acute care setting, for example, urgent care or emergency department.

(6) "Hospice" means a model of care that focuses on relieving symptoms and supporting patients with a life expectancy of six months or less. Hospice involves an interdisciplinary approach to provide health care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support. The emphasis is on comfort, quality of life and patient and family support. Hospice can be provided in the patient's home as well as freestanding hospice facilities, hospitals, nursing homes, or other long-term care facilities.

(7) "Morphine equivalent dose" means a conversion of various opioids to a morphine equivalent dose by the use of accepted conversion tables.

(8) "Multidisciplinary pain clinic" means a clinic or office that provides comprehensive pain management and includes care provided by multiple available disciplines or treatment modalities, for example, medical care through physicians, physician assistants, osteopathic physicians, osteopathic physician assistants, advanced registered nurse practitioners, and physical therapy, occupational therapy, or other complementary therapies.

(9) "Palliative" means care that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing life-threatening illness. With palliative care particular attention is given to the prevention, assessment, and treatment of pain and other symptoms, and to the provision of psychological, spiritual, and emotional support.

WAC 246-919-853. Patient evaluation.

The physician shall obtain, evaluate, and document the patient's health history and physical examination in the health record prior to treating for chronic noncancer pain.

(1) The patient's health history shall include:

- (a) Current and past treatments for pain;
- (b) Comorbidities; and
- (c) Any substance abuse.

(2) The patient's health history should include:

(a) A review of any available prescription monitoring program or emergency department-based information exchange; and

(b) Any relevant information from a pharmacist provided to a physician.

(3) The initial patient evaluation shall include:

- (a) Physical examination;
- (b) The nature and intensity of the pain;
- (c) The effect of the pain on physical and psychological function;
- (d) Medications including indication(s), date, type, dosage, and quantity prescribed;
- (e) A risk screening of the patient for potential comorbidities and risk factors using an appropriate screening tool.

The screening should address:

- (i) History of addiction;
- (ii) Abuse or aberrant behavior regarding opioid use;
- (iii) Psychiatric conditions;
- (iv) Regular concomitant use of benzodiazepines, alcohol, or other central nervous system medications;
- (v) Poorly controlled depression or anxiety;
- (vi) Evidence or risk of significant adverse events, including falls or fractures;
- (vii) Receipt of opioids from more than one prescribing practitioner or practitioner group;
- (viii) Repeated visits to emergency departments seeking opioids;
- (ix) History of sleep apnea or other respiratory risk factors;
- (x) Possible or current pregnancy; and
- (xi) History of allergies or intolerances.

(4) The initial patient evaluation should include:

- (a) Any available diagnostic, therapeutic, and laboratory results; and
- (b) Any available consultations.
- (5) The health record shall be maintained in an accessible manner, readily available for review, and should include:
 - (a) The diagnosis, treatment plan, and objectives;
 - (b) Documentation of the presence of one or more recognized indications for the use of pain medication;
 - (c) Documentation of any medication prescribed;
 - (d) Results of periodic reviews;
 - (e) Any written agreements for treatment between the patient and the physician; and
 - (f) The physician's instructions to the patient.

WAC 246-919-854. Treatment plan.

(1) The written treatment plan shall state the objectives that will be used to determine treatment success and shall include, at a minimum:

- (a) Any change in pain relief;
- (b) Any change in physical and psychosocial function; and
- (c) Additional diagnostic evaluations or other planned treatments.

(2) After treatment begins the physician should adjust drug therapy to the individual health needs of the patient. The physician shall include indications for medication use on the prescription and require photo identification of the person picking up the prescription in order to fill. The physician shall advise the patient that it is the patient's responsibility to safeguard all medications and keep them in a secure location.

(3) Other treatment modalities or a rehabilitation program may be necessary depending on the etiology of the pain and the extent to which the pain is associated with physical and psychosocial impairment.

WAC 246-919-855. Informed consent.

The physician shall discuss the risks and benefits of treatment options with the patient, persons designated by the patient, or with the patient's surrogate or guardian if the patient is without health care decision-making capacity.

WAC 246-919-856. Written agreement for treatment.

Chronic noncancer pain patients should receive all chronic pain management prescriptions from one physician and one pharmacy whenever possible. If the patient is at high risk for medication abuse, or has a history of substance abuse, or psychiatric comorbidities, the prescribing physician shall use a written agreement for treatment with the patient outlining patient responsibilities. This written agreement for treatment shall include:

- (1) The patient's agreement to provide biological samples for urine/serum medical level screening when requested by the physician;
- (2) The patient's agreement to take medications at the dose and frequency prescribed with a specific protocol for lost prescriptions and early refills;
- (3) Reasons for which drug therapy may be discontinued (e.g., violation of agreement);
- (4) The requirement that all chronic pain management prescriptions are provided by a single prescriber or multidisciplinary pain clinic and dispensed by a single pharmacy or pharmacy system;
- (5) The patient's agreement to not abuse alcohol or use other medically unauthorized substances;
- (6) A written authorization for:

(a) The physician to release the agreement for treatment to local emergency departments, urgent care facilities, and pharmacies; and

(b) Other practitioners to report violations of the agreement back to the physician;

(7) A written authorization that the physician may notify the proper authorities if he or she has reason to believe the patient has engaged in illegal activity;

(8) Acknowledgment that a violation of the agreement may result in a tapering or discontinuation of the prescription;

(9) Acknowledgment that it is the patient's responsibility to safeguard all medications and keep them in a secure location; and

(10) Acknowledgment that if the patient violates the terms of the agreement, the violation and the physician's response to the violation will be documented, as well as the rationale for changes in the treatment plan.

WAC 246-919-857. Periodic review.

The physician shall periodically review the course of treatment for chronic noncancer pain, the patient's state of health, and any new information about the etiology of the pain. Generally, periodic reviews shall take place at least every six months. However, for treatment of stable patients with chronic noncancer pain involving nonescalating daily dosages of forty milligrams of a morphine equivalent dose (MED) or less, periodic reviews shall take place at least annually.

(1) During the periodic review, the physician shall determine:

(a) Patient's compliance with any medication treatment plan;

(b) If pain, function, or quality of life have improved or diminished using objective evidence, considering any available information from family members or other caregivers; and

(c) If continuation or modification of medications for pain management treatment is necessary based on the physician's evaluation of progress towards treatment objectives.

(2) The physician shall assess the appropriateness of continued use of the current treatment plan if the patient's progress or compliance with current treatment plan is unsatisfactory. The physician shall consider tapering, changing, or discontinuing treatment when:

(a) Function or pain does not improve after a trial period;

(b) There is evidence of significant adverse effects;

(c) Other treatment modalities are indicated; or

(d) There is evidence of misuse, addiction, or diversion.

(3) The physician should periodically review information from any available prescription monitoring program or emergency department-based information exchange.

(4) The physician should periodically review any relevant information from a pharmacist provided to the physician.

WAC 246-919-858. Long-acting opioids, including methadone.

Long-acting opioids, including methadone, should only be prescribed by a physician who is familiar with its risks and use, and who is prepared to conduct the necessary careful monitoring. Special attention should be given to patients who are initiating such treatment. The physician prescribing long-acting opioids or methadone should have a one-time (lifetime) completion of at least four hours of continuing education relating to this topic.

WAC 246-919-859. Episodic care.

(1) When evaluating patients for episodic care, such as emergency or urgent care, the physician should review any available prescription monitoring program, emergency department-based information exchange, or other tracking system.

(2) Episodic care practitioners should avoid providing opioids for chronic pain management. However, if opioids are provided, the practitioner should limit the use of opioids for a chronic noncancer pain patient to the minimum amount necessary to control the pain until the patient can receive care from a primary care practitioner.

(3) Prescriptions for opioids written by an episodic care practitioner shall include indications for use or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) code and shall be written to require photo identification of the person picking up the prescription in order to fill.

(4) If a patient has signed a written agreement for treatment and has provided a written authorization to release the agreement under *WAC 246-919-856(6)* to episodic care practitioners, then the episodic care practitioner should report known violations of the agreement back to the patient's treatment practitioner who provided the agreement for treatment.

WAC 246-919-860. Consultation -- Recommendations and requirements.

(1) The physician shall consider, and document the consideration, referring the patient for additional evaluation and treatment as needed to achieve treatment objectives. Special attention should be given to those chronic noncancer pain patients who are under eighteen years of age, or who are at risk for medication misuse, abuse, or diversion. The management of pain in patients with a history of substance abuse or with comorbid psychiatric disorders may require extra care, monitoring, documentation, and consultation with, or referral to, an expert in the management of such patients.

(2) The mandatory consultation threshold for adults is one hundred twenty milligrams morphine equivalent dose (MED)(oral). In the event a physician prescribes a dosage amount that meets or exceeds the consultation threshold of one hundred twenty milligrams MED (orally) per day, a consultation with a pain management specialist as described in *WAC 246-919-863* is required, unless the consultation is exempted under *WAC 246-919-861* or *246-919-862*. Great caution should be used when prescribing opioids to children with chronic noncancer pain and appropriate referrals to a specialist is encouraged.

(a) The mandatory consultation shall consist of at least one of the following:

(i) An office visit with the patient and the pain management specialist;

(ii) A telephone consultation between the pain management specialist and the physician;

(iii) An electronic consultation between the pain management specialist and the physician; or

(iv) An audio-visual evaluation conducted by the pain management specialist remotely, where the patient is present with either the physician or a licensed health care practitioner designated by the physician or the pain management specialist.

(b) A physician shall document each mandatory consultation with the pain management specialist. Any written record of the consultation by the pain management specialist shall be maintained as a patient record by the specialist. If the specialist provides a written record of the consultation to the physician, the physician shall maintain it as part of the patient record.

(3) Nothing in this chapter shall limit any person's ability to contractually require a consultation with a pain management specialist at any time. For the purposes of *WAC 246-919-850* through *246-919-863*, "person" means an individual, a trust or estate, a firm, a partnership, a corporation (including associations, joint stock companies, and insurance companies), the state, or a political subdivision or instrumentality of the state, including a municipal corporation or a hospital district.

WAC 246-919-861. Consultation -- Exemptions for exigent and special circumstances.

A physician is not required to consult with a pain management specialist as described in *WAC 246-919-863* when he or she has documented adherence to all standards of practice as defined in *WAC 246-919-850* through *246-919-863* and when any one or more of the following conditions apply:

- (1) The patient is following a tapering schedule;
- (2) The patient requires treatment for acute pain which may or may not include hospitalization, requiring a temporary escalation in opioid dosage, with expected return to or below their baseline dosage level; or
- (3) The physician documents reasonable attempts to obtain a consultation with a pain management specialist and the circumstances justifying prescribing above one hundred twenty milligrams morphine equivalent dose (MED) per day without first obtaining a consultation; or
- (4) The physician documents the patient's pain and function is stable and the patient is on a nonescalating dosage of opioids.

WAC 246-919-862. Consultation -- Exemptions for the physician.

The physician is exempt from the consultation requirement in *WAC 246-919-860* if one or more of the following qualifications are met:

- (1) The physician is a pain management specialist under *WAC 246-919-863*; or
- (2) The physician has successfully completed, within the last two years, a minimum of twelve (Category I) continuing education hours on chronic pain management with at least two of these hours dedicated to long acting opioids; or
- (3) The physician is a pain management practitioner working in a multidisciplinary chronic pain treatment center, or a multidisciplinary academic research facility; or
- (4) The physician has a minimum three years of clinical experience in a chronic pain management setting, and at least thirty percent of his or her current practice is the direct provision of pain management care.

WAC 246-919-863. Pain management specialist.

A pain management specialist shall meet one or more of the following qualifications:

- (1) If a physician or osteopathic physician:
 - (a) Board certified or board eligible by an American Board of Medical Specialties-approved board (ABMS) or by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) in physical medicine and rehabilitation, rehabilitation medicine, neurology, rheumatology, or anesthesiology; or
 - (b) Has a subspecialty certificate in pain medicine by an ABMS-approved board; or
 - (c) Has a certification of added qualification in pain management by the AOA; or
 - (d) A minimum of three years of clinical experience in a chronic pain management care setting; and
 - (i) Credentialed in pain management by an entity approved by the Washington state medical quality assurance commission for physicians or the Washington state board of osteopathic medicine and surgery for osteopathic physicians; and
 - (ii) Successful completion of a minimum of at least eighteen continuing education hours in pain management during the past two years for physicians or three years for osteopathic physicians; and
 - (iii) At least thirty percent of the physician's or osteopathic physician's current practice is the direct provision of pain management care or is in a multidisciplinary pain clinic.
- (2) If a dentist: Board certified or board eligible in oral medicine or orofacial pain by the American Board of Oral Medicine or the American Board of Orofacial Pain.
- (3) If an advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP):
 - (a) A minimum of three years of clinical experience in a chronic pain management care setting;
 - (b) Credentialed in pain management by the Washington state nursing care quality assurance commission-approved national professional association, pain association, or other credentialing entity;

(c) Successful completion of a minimum of at least eighteen continuing education hours in pain management during the past two years; and

(d) At least thirty percent of the ARNP's current practice is the direct provision of pain management care or is in a multidisciplinary pain clinic.

(4) If a podiatric physician:

(a) Board certified or board eligible in a specialty that includes a focus on pain management by the American Board of Podiatric Surgery, the American Board of Podiatric Orthopedics and Primary Podiatric Medicine, or other accredited certifying board as approved by the Washington state podiatric medical board; or

(b) A minimum of three years of clinical experience in a chronic pain management care setting; and

(c) Credentialed in pain management by the Washington state podiatric medical board-approved national professional association, pain association, or other credentialing entity; and

(d) Successful completion of a minimum of at least eighteen hours of continuing education in pain management during the past two years, and at least thirty percent of the podiatric physician's current practice is the direct provision of pain management care.