Opioids for the Management of Chronic Pain
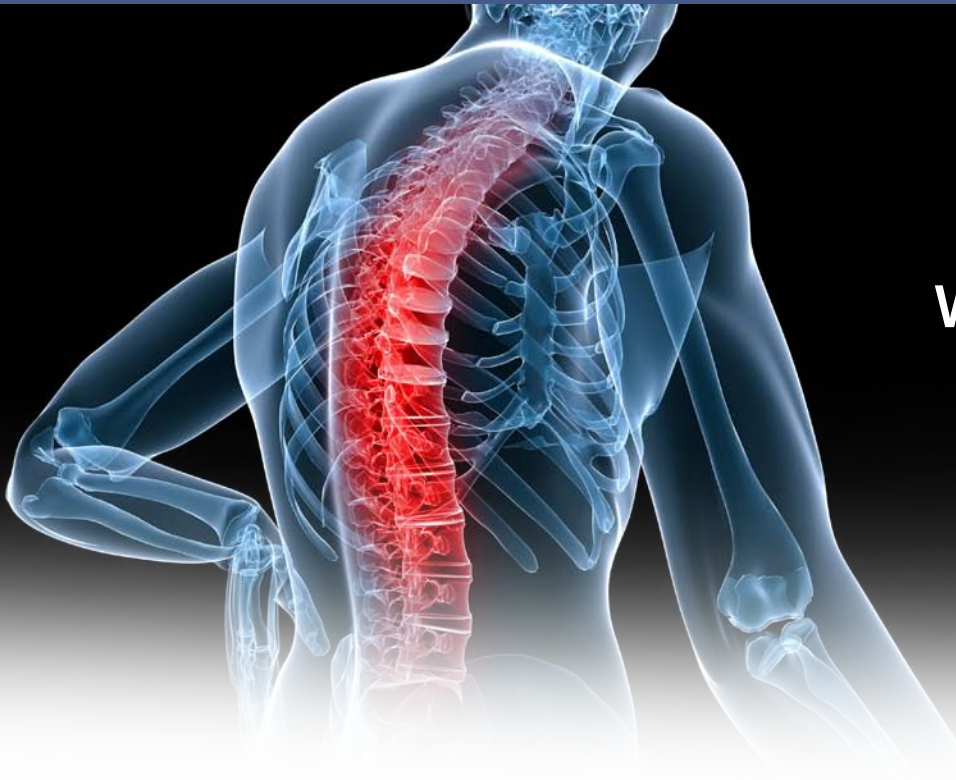

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Opioids for the Management of Chronic Pain

- Opioids are useful in the treatment of moderate to severe pain, especially in patients who fail to respond to non-opioid therapies. The long term use of opioids should be limited to specific situations.

- On average, opioid medications can reduce your pain by about 30%.

- Opioids may be beneficial in helping you function better at work and may improve personal relationships.

- Sometimes opioids are combined with another type of pain reliever to better manage your pain.

- Chronic opioid (e.g., treatment for longer than 3 months) therapy is best managed when you successfully adhere to the treatment agreement set between you and your doctor.

- Chronic opioid therapy will require patients to maintain regular monthly office visits

- Chronic opioid therapy will be limited by the health care provider to an amount for which (she)he is comfortable prescribing for each patient. This amount may differ for each patient

What are the risks of taking my prescribed opioid medication?

- Opioids have many drug interactions that can be harmful to your health. It is important to give your doctor a complete list of all medications you are taking, including recreational drugs, alcohol and sleeping medications.

- Potential risks and side effects include, but not limited to, dependency, addiction, tolerance, hyperalgesia, anxiety, depression, insomnia, decreased sex drive, immunologic disturbances, respiratory depression and death.

- The most common side effect of opioids is constipation. Your doctor may give you medications to take daily while on your opioids to help regulate your bowel movements.

- Taking opioids with certain other medications may result in decreased breathing, also called respiratory depression. These medications can include, but are not limited to, Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan, Soma, Ambien and other sleeping medications.

- Your reaction times may be slower while on opioids. This can be extremely dangerous, especially before you know how the medication affects you. In a recent study, opioid users were found to be 40% more likely to be involved in a car accident than patient's not taking opioids.

- If you take an opioid for long periods of time, it may become less helpful in controlling your pain. This is called tolerance, and should be discussed with your doctor.

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- Medication therapy with opioids may result in increased sensitivity to pain also called hyperalgesia.

- Medication therapy with opioids may also lead to:

  - Addiction: Continued use of an opioid, even if it causes harm

  - Abuse: The use of an opioid for non-medical purposes (getting "high")

  - Dependency: Physical dependency is revealed when the opioid is abruptly discontinued resulting in withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms may include anxiety, irritability, chills and hot flashes, sweating, nausea and vomiting.

- Do not stop taking your opioid without talking to your doctor first.

- Keep track of your medications so that you don't run out early, and store them in a safe place where no one else can get to them.

What else can I do to manage my pain?

- Other, non-narcotic medications

- Local therapies (special pain creams, patches, electronic devices and other)

- Relaxation: This can include deep breathing, listening to music, or meditation

- Psychological counseling: Helps dealing with other stressors that may be increasing your pain. It also helps you to cope with the pain and to improve your function.

- Physical therapy and exercise: Reduces pain and helps to regain strength

- Medical procedures, such as injections, implantable pain management devices, or surgery: Talk to your doctor.

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