Chronic pain affects millions of Americans, and opioids can provide relief for some patients who sorely need it. Over the past decade there has been a fourfold increase in opioid prescribing\(^1\). However, that rise coincides with an increase in unintentional and intentional abuse of opioids. As a prescriber, one of the most important and challenging situations you face is how to effectively communicate with your patients about the safe use of opioids for chronic pain.

**Did you know?** Opioid misuse has become a national epidemic affecting millions.

The number of hospitalizations involving opioids for Michigan residents increased 120\% between 2000 and 2011.\(^2\)

The opioid-related death rate in Genesee County is **significantly higher** than both the State and national rate.\(^3\)

Genesee County physicians prescribe more opioids per person than most other Michigan counties.\(^3\)

Potential **warning signs** of opioid misuse may include any of the following:

- History of doctor shopping
- Textbook descriptions of symptoms but few details about medical history
- Saying they’re visiting friends or relatives and need a prescription
- Request for early refills
- Unusual knowledge of opioids
- Claiming to have lost prescription

Consider the following when **prescribing opioids** to patients:

**Consider a Patient Prescriber Agreement**

Helps patients and family members understand the goals of treatment as well as safe use of medications

**Discuss the Safe Use of Opioids**

Explain how to take opioids as prescribed and discuss product-specific information about medication prescribed

**Outline the Dangers of Sharing**

Sharing opioids is illegal, is a major health risk, and can have dangerous side effects for unintended users

**Explain the Need for Safe Storage**

Advise the need for patients to keep opioids in a safe and secure location away from children and others

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References:

2. MDCH. Opioid related hospitalizations in Michigan, 2000-2011. Office of Recovery Oriented Systems of Care, Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics, and Bureau of Disease Control, Prevention, and Epidemiology.

Brought to you by the Greater Flint Health Coalition’s Mental Health & Substance Use Task Force