

Physicians



PHAX
June, 2004

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Writing Discharge/Outpatient Opioid Prescriptions

REGULATIONS: Different states have different rules concerning controlled substances: amount of drug that may be dispensed, number of refills, fax orders and telephone prescriptions, and requirements for special prescription forms or blanks.

LEGIBILITY: The DEA # and name must be legible. Print your name after your signature or otherwise indicate the spelling of your name on a personalized prescription.

FREQUENCY: Consider if the frequency you are prescribing is the *recommended* frequency. Third party payers may not pay for medications prescribed to be taken more frequently than recommended in the literature.

STRENGTH: There are more than two dozen combination opioids available; it is good practice to always write the correct strength for combination opioids (e.g. oxycodone/acetaminophen 5 mg/325 mg). Be sure to check the available pill/tablet doses when prescribing long acting opioids.

ACETOMINOPHEN: Consider whether the 4000 mg/day maximum can be exceeded when writing the frequency. Most pharmacists will not dispense doses likely to exceed this recommended maximum daily dose.

TAMPERING: Write the number after the number ?10? (ten) to prevent someone altering the prescription (e.g. changing 10 to 40 by changing a 1 to a 4).

SUBSTITUTIONS/CORRECTIONS: The pharmacist will not substitute or correct an improperly written prescription, nor will a prescription for an opioid be filled when written on a prescription printed with "not for controlled substances". Thus if you write for 80 mg of MS Contin, the pharmacist will not fill it since the medicine is not available as a 80 mg tablet.

COMMUNICATION: When prescribing opioids that are infrequently used or in high doses, communicate with the pharmacist *before the patient is discharged or leaves your office* to assure availability. Pharmacists prefer communication from physicians and nurses in advance so medications can be stocked.

References: Dunwoody, C. and Arnold R. Fast Facts and Concepts #94. Writing discharge/outpatient opioid scripts. July 2003. End-of-Life Physician Education Resource Center, www.Eperc.mcw.edu.