

KEY FINDINGS: Released April 29, 2015

***New Research Uncovers Disconnect In Pain-Related Communications
Between Prescribers of Pain Medications and Patients***

New research released today by the [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#) confirms several “disconnects” in the pain-related communication between healthcare prescribers of prescription opiates (Rx painkillers) and their patients. The new data was fielded by the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, in collaboration with the [American Cancer Society](#), the [American Academy of Pain Management](#) and [Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals](#) to gain a better understanding of the interactions between opiate-prescribing healthcare providers and patients.

Disconnect Between Prescribers and Patients Can Lead to Dependence, Addiction

- Although most patients do not misuse or abuse their prescriptions, roughly 1 in 10 pain patients (7 percent of chronic pain patients and 13 percent of acute pain patients) report misusing their opiate prescription medicines, and more than 1 in 10 (13 percent of chronic pain patients and 15 percent of acute pain patients) have taken someone else’s opiate prescription.
- Almost half of pain patients surveyed (46 percent) expressed some form of concern about taking prescription opiates: 39 percent of chronic pain patients and 30 percent of acute pain patients are concerned with becoming addicted to their pain medications; and 38 percent of chronic pain patients and 43 percent of acute pain patients feel uncomfortable taking their prescribed opiate prescriptions.
- A majority of prescribers say they discuss the potential of dependence or addiction with their pain patients. Two-thirds of primary care physicians (65 percent) and half of pain management specialists (51 percent) say they “always” give information regarding the potential for addiction and dependency. And indeed, more than 3 in 4 prescribers surveyed (77 percent) said they are primarily responsible for providing information about the potential to become addicted or dependent on opiates.
- When asked who, if anyone, had explained to them the potential for becoming dependent on or addicted to Rx painkillers, 19 percent of chronic pain patients and 40 percent of acute pain patients said “no one.”

Patients’ Improper Use of Rx Opiates Causes Concern Among Physicians

- The majority of prescribers (77 percent of primary care physicians and 75 percent of pain management specialists) believe that patients do not always use their prescribed opiates in accordance with instructions.
- Among patients, more than 8 in 10 (85 percent of chronic pain patients and 82 percent of acute pain patients) say they always follow the instructions from their physicians when taking their opiate prescriptions.
- The data found that while a majority of patients surveyed said they take their Rx painkillers as directed, more than 4 in 10 chronic pain patients (43 percent) took longer to finish their prescription and 50 percent of acute pain patients did not finish their pain medication as directed – usually in an effort to prolong their prescription or save for another time.

Casual Attitudes Among Patients About Safeguarding of Rx Painkillers, Keeping Them Away from Children

- Only 11 percent of chronic pain patients and 13 percent of acute pain patients say they are concerned with someone else in their household accessing their medications; and only 42 percent of chronic and 52 of acute pain

patients who have children in the household said they store their medication somewhere their children cannot reach.

While a majority of pain patients reported their doctors did not discuss proper storage and disposal of Rx painkillers with them, approximately 20 percent of physicians said they had those important discussions:

- Approximately 1 in 5 prescribers said they “always” give their patients information on how to store and dispose of their medications, including information on where to store medication (23 percent of primary care physicians and 25 percent of pain management specialists) and what to do with expired medication (20 percent of primary care physicians and 27 percent of pain management specialists).
- Most patients reported they did not receive information on where to store medication (51 percent of chronic pain patients and 58 percent of acute pain patients) or what to do with expired medication (57 percent of chronic pain patients and 60 percent of acute pain patients).

Some Prescribers Feel Unprepared To Identify, Address Rx Painkiller Abuse

- The majority of prescribers (60 percent of primary care physicians and 65 percent of pain management specialists) say they are only “somewhat” prepared to identify opiate misusers.
- Also, only 36 percent of primary care physicians and 45 percent of pain management specialists say medical school prepared them to identify opiate misusers; and only 69 percent of primary care physicians say they have received any type of formal training.
- There are also a number of prescribers who do not feel comfortable prescribing opiates (20 percent of primary care physicians); doubt their ability to identify substance abusers (21 percent of primary care physicians and 16 percent of pain management specialists); and are concerned with their ability to correctly assess a patient’s risk of opiate addiction (67 percent of primary care physicians and 67 percent of pain management specialists).
- Some prescribers have these reservations because they want to avoid contributing to the misuse and abuse of opiates. Two-thirds of primary care physicians (66 percent) and 73 percent of pain management specialists are concerned with causing addiction.
- The survey also found that some patients who are afflicted with pain are actually seeking alternatives to treating their pain exclusively with opiates. Roughly 9 in 10 chronic pain patients (90 percent) have tried using a non-opiate based treatment before relying on opiates. The most common alternative treatments were physical therapy (84 percent), pain relieving injections (69 percent) and massages (52 percent).
- Prescribers are offering these alternatives more than they once did, as 78 percent of primary care physicians and 69 percent of pain management specialists say they are increasingly promoting alternative treatments as opposed to opiate medications to chronic pain patients.