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Use of Opioid Analgesics in Managed Care Practice: Challenges, Controversies, REMS, and Optimizing Patient Management

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Use of Opioid Analgesics in Managed Care Practice: Challenges, Controversies, REMS, and Optimizing Patient Management

Release date: August 15, 2015

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Type of activity: Knowledge

Medium: Print with Internet-based posttest, evaluation, and request for credit

Fee: Free

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Intended Audience

Managed care physicians and pharmacists.

Activity Overview

The management of chronic pain can be complex, and it frequently presents itself as a multidimensional problem that seriously impacts both the culture and economy of managed care practice. Opioid analgesics available by prescription have been used for many years to treat acute medical, traumatic, and postoperative pain, along with chronic pain that frequently accompanies malignancies and end-stage illnesses. Beginning in the 1980s, the medical community moved to more widespread use of opioids for treatment of non-cancer pain, leading to the prescribing of considerable quantities of these drugs. This increase subsequently led to unintended consequences, including inappropriate self-medication by patients and recreational use of these drugs. While opioids are generally considered to be some of the most effective drugs for pain management, their use has become a critical public health concern due to abuse of these medications, addiction, and deaths from opioid overdose. Both immediate- and extended-release opioid formulations are abused and are known to have contributed to overdoses.

This supplement to *The American Journal of Managed Care* will describe patients with or at risk for opioid use disorder to facilitate early intervention and treatment, outline the clinical and economic impact of opioid misuse and the implementation of a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program into managed care practice, and distinguish between general and product-specific drug information surrounding different extended-release and long-acting opioid analgesics, including updated safety labeling.

Statement of Educational Need

Opioids are thought to be the most effective drug for pain management, and their use has increased 10-fold since the 1990s. However, the use of opioids has created a major public health concern due to misuse and abuse. Opioid abuse generates increased costs for healthcare providers, payers, and society as a whole. It is important for healthcare providers to be aware of the substantial economic burden of opioid misuse, which has been estimated at \$53 billion annually in the United States. Opioid abusers utilize healthcare services 8 times more than non-abusers. In an attempt to ensure the safe prescribing of this class, the FDA has enacted a classwide REMS program that requires prescriber and patient education. Physicians are reluctant to prescribe opioids because of a lack of confidence in treating non-cancer-related pain, a fear of patient abuse, and the necessity of com-

plying with the REMS requirements. This could leave a substantial number of patients with legitimate chronic pain receiving inadequate pain management. In order to ensure the safe use of opioids, clinicians and payers must understand that the cost of implementing REMS elements offsets the cost of opioid abuse and must ensure that the REMS elements are integrated into standard practice. Prescribers must feel that the REMS elements are not a burden to their practice and will not impact patient care. In the end, this will help to ensure better identification of appropriate patients for opioid therapy and better pain management.

Educational Objectives

Upon completion of this activity, participants should be able to:

- Review patients with or at risk for opioid use disorder to facilitate early intervention and treatment
- Outline the clinical and economic impact of opioid misuse and its effects on both patients and society at large
- Recall the clinical and economic impact of implementing a REMS program into managed care practice
- Discuss the general and product-specific drug information surrounding different extended-release/long-acting opioid analgesics, including updated safety labeling

Physician Credit

Accreditation Statement

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Obtaining Credit: Participants must read the article, complete the online posttest achieving a passing score of 70% or higher, and complete an online evaluation and request for credit. Detailed instructions on obtaining CE/CME credit are included at the end of this activity.

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