



ROYAL COLLEGE
OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF CANADA
COLLÈGE ROYAL
DES MÉDECINS ET CHIRURGIENS DU CANADA

royalcollege.ca • collegeroyal.ca

Royal College Statement of Principles on Opioid Use

Introduction

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada developed this Statement of Principles on Opioid Use to guide its response to the health risks and system challenges associated with the opioid crisis.

Opioid medications can reduce pain, improve the patient's ability to function and produce a feeling of well-being or euphoria (CCSA, 2015). Pain is the most common complaint for which patients seek medical treatment and an estimated 15%-29% of Canadians experience chronic pain (Fischer & Argento, 2012). According to the [International Narcotics Control Board](#) (2013), Canada is the second largest consumer per capita of prescription opioids. In 2012, 18.3 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed in Canada. In 2014, that figure jumped 18.6% to 21.7 million (Fischer & Argento, 2012) while opioid-related deaths doubled from 1991 to 2004 (Dhalla et al., 2009). In recent years, concern about the 'opioid crisis' has risen within the medical profession, law enforcement and government, whereby we now see this complex issue as both a public health and public safety concern.

The harms associated with prescription opioid abuse include both health related and societal level concerns. Health-related concerns including addiction, overdose, and death are coupled with societal concerns of crime and victimization, pressures on community and increased demand for treatment resources. As such, a multi-pronged, response is required; one that engages a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure that patients, families, communities and system needs are met.

Our response

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada has been actively advancing patient safety by creating a set of patient safety competencies, promoting the application of best available evidence to enhance safe prescribing and developing ethical and educational standards for the accreditation of high quality learning, simulation and assessment activities. With multiple specialties initiating the prescribing of opioids, the issues of pain management, safe prescribing practices, assessing for opioid dependency and abuse are of relevance for many of our Fellows. The Royal College is committed to supporting Fellows to sustain and continuously enhance the competencies required to provide effective and safe health care. Furthermore, the Royal College believes that all health professionals must aspire to the highest levels of care. This goal is supported in part by the development of high quality education activities, and reinforced by ongoing research, professional and medical regulatory oversight.

Education initiatives are one strategy with the potential to reduce the harms related to opioid usage while ensuring Canadians have timely and appropriate access to these medications for therapeutic purposes.

The following principles will guide the Royal College's response to the Opioid Crisis:

1. Patient experience and outcomes

Patients should gain the optimal benefit from opioids and other pharmacological interventions to achieve effective pain management while minimizing poor outcomes (i.e. hyperalgesia, myoclonus) and adverse events (i.e. unintended overdoses, self-medication).

2. Promoting safe practice

Support the implementation of strategies and approaches that reduce harm, diminish variability in prescribing practices, enable appropriate assessments of patients and reduce preventable deaths from opioid medication.

3. Access to real-time, technological resources and supports

Physicians require real-time, point of care access to educational resources to inform their prescribing treatment decisions. These tools must be relevant to the specialist's scope of practice (including clinical setting and patient population needs).

4. High quality, effective education and practice interventions

Provide and promote access to high quality education based on best available evidence (i.e. guidelines, systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials) and develop practice support tools that will foster the translation of best evidence into competencies that are required to manage patients in acute and chronic pain.

5. Inter-professional collaborative practice

Recognize that comprehensive patient care is frequently provided by inter & intra professional health-care teams. Continue to promote and advocate for safer opioid prescribing, consumption and disposal across the health professions.

6. Commitment to collaboration

Capitalize on existing resources and initiatives as there is no single solution to the current opioid crisis. The complexity of this public health and public safety issue necessitates efforts on the parts of many stakeholder groups including; health care organizations, providers and patient groups, governments, provincial medical regulatory bodies, law enforcement, social service agencies and others. Efforts should be complimentary and coordinated across all sectors to optimize safer opioid use. Where there are gaps, the Royal College is positioned to support the development of additional high quality specialty care educational resources or tools.

Conclusion

Given the complexity of the opioid crisis, the health impacts on patients and the multiple stakeholders involved, the Royal College remains committed to working together to promoting access to and the appropriate application of the highest quality practice-based educational materials and practice resources for Fellows who assess, treat and/or manage patients with acute and chronic pain. The Royal College recognizes that managing acute and chronic pain is a complex task for health care providers and patients alike. These shared principles will act as a guide for our future actions as we collaborate with Fellows and other partner organizations to address the opioid crisis in Canada and ensure the best health and the best care for all.