

“The CDC Guideline Requires All Patients to be Tapered.”

SCOPE of Pain Colleague to Colleague Podcast #13

Welcome back to the *SCOPE of Pain* podcast series. This is Dr. Daniel Alford, Professor of Medicine and Course Director for the Boston University School of Medicine *SCOPE of Pain* program. We will now discuss a common misapplication of the CDC’s Safe Opioid Prescribing guideline.

Your medical director states that over the next six months, all patients on opioids must be decreased below 90 morphine milligram equivalents as per the mandate of the CDC guideline. What does the CDC guideline say about a dosing threshold of 90 morphine milligram equivalents?

The CDC guideline emphasizes that patients should receive appropriate pain management. That clinical decision-making should be based on a relationship between the clinician and the patient, and that the guideline recommendations are voluntary rather than prescriptive standards.

As far as the 90 morphine milligram equivalent cut-off, the guideline states clinicians should try to avoid increasing opioid doses to greater than 90 morphine milligram equivalents per day and should carefully justify a decision to increase the dose to greater than 90 based on an individualized assessment of the benefits and risks.

For established patients who are already taking high-dose opioids, as well as those patients transferring from other clinicians, they should be offered the opportunity to reevaluate their continued use of high-dose opioids in light of recent evidence regarding the association of high-dose opioids and overdose risk.

Clinicians should empathically review the benefits and risks of continued high-dose opioids and should offer to work with the patient to taper opioids to safer levels.

Based on widespread misapplication of the CDC guidance on opioid dose, both the FDA and CDC issued statements regarding involuntary opioid discontinuation. An FDA safety alert was issued on the potential harm from sudden opioid discontinuation, and the original authors of the CDC opioid prescribing guideline reiterated in an article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that the guideline should not be used as justification to mandate opioid tapering.

The CDC also issued a press release stating that they oppose policies or practices that result in hard limits or cutting off opioids, as these are flawed policies and practices and they put patients at risk. These statements also gained further support from the U.S. Surgeon General and the American Medical Association.

The CDC Safer Opioid Prescribing guideline recommendations are addressed in the *SCOPE of Pain* program. You are not alone in facing these challenging issues.

Thanks for listening.

Be sure to check back often, as new Podcasts will be added throughout the year.

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