Engaging Patients and Caregivers

Here are a few tips to help you identify potential issues and get a sense of the patient’s need, history and propensity to addictive behavior. Avoid jargon and ask open-ended questions such as:

- What medications are you currently taking?
- What other ways are you managing your pain?
- What addictions, if any, have you or your family members experienced? (i.e., alcohol, drugs)
- Describe how you normally take your medications, for instance, do you use a pill reminder system?
- Could you describe how you typically store your medications, including prescription opioids?
- What questions do you have about your medications?

As you ask these questions, it is important to actively listen to the patient’s responses and assess their non-verbal behavior to gain the best understanding of their individual situation.

If your conversation raises red flags, consider alerting the prescriber. (See the prescriber engagement guide for suggestions.)

Key Topics for Discussion

**Potential Side Effects and Risks**

Discuss side effects and addictive properties of the medication, educate on how to manage the risks of prescription opioids and encourage your patient to express any concerns. For example:

*Prescription opioids are strong pain-reducing medications that come with serious risk of addiction and overdose when used in ways they are not intended. Do you have any questions or concerns?*

**Safe Use**

Be clear on the correct dosing, reinforce that it is important to take medication exactly as prescribed and discuss the risks of using the medication inappropriately. Make sure that your patient knows that they should not share this medication. For example:

*It is important to take the prescription exactly as it is prescribed and never share it with someone else.*

**Drug Interactions**

Ensure your patient knows which medications they should avoid while taking the opioid prescription. Additionally, remind them to avoid alcohol when taking these medications. For example:

*While taking this medication you should also avoid alcohol and certain other prescription medications.*
**Alternative Treatments**

Provide non-opioid alternatives, show them over-the-counter options in the store and elaborate on directions for use if there is interest. For example:

*Have you talked with your healthcare provider about alternative pain treatments? There are other ways to manage pain, including over-the-counter medication, physical therapy and other approaches.*

**Medication Storage and Disposal**

Talk to patients about their responsibility to safely store and dispose of unused pills. Suggest they keep track of their medication as closely as they would their money. Describe their options for proper disposal and discourage them from saving the medication for future use. For example:

*Safely storing and promptly disposing of unused prescription opioids can help prevent misuse and abuse:*

- These medicines should be stored in a secure, preferably locked, place.
- Monitor the medicine you take and how much you have left so you will know if there is any missing.
- Once you are done taking the medication, safely dispose of it as soon as possible. Do not keep leftover prescriptions in the home for future use.
- There are several ways to safely dispose of your medication:
  1. **Drop off your medication at an authorized disposal location.**
     (Share information about local drop-off locations or direct them to visit www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org)
  2. **Use an at-home drug deactivation product.**
     (Show product to patient if available in the pharmacy.)

**Family Education**

Offer to educate family members or others in the home, including caregivers.

- Explain the various warning signs that indicate dependency or addiction.
- Share that symptoms of addiction can be physical, behavioral and psychological, the clearest sign being the inability to stop using the substance.
- Emphasize the importance of watching their loved one for signs of addiction.
- Ask if a pill reminder system is used and describe how it may be helpful in assisting a loved one remember to take their medication and to minimize the potential for misuse or abuse.
- Discuss other side effects such as tolerance, physical dependence, increased sensitivity to pain, constipation, nausea, vomiting and dry mouth, sleepiness and dizziness, confusion, depression, low levels of testosterone, and itching and sweating.

**Addiction Treatment**

If a patient has an addiction to pain medicine, you can suggest they contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s treatment help line at 1-800-622-HELP (4357).

**Additional Resources**

Visit www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org/PharmacyToolkit for additional resources and AAOA’s Disposal Tool, which provides state drop-off locations.

Learn more at www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org

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