



Opioid prescribing best practices: Co-prescribing naloxone with opioids

Co-prescribing naloxone and opioids remains a top strategy for opioid safety. EQIC is providing the following best practices reviewing the value of co-prescribing for inpatients.

Background

Opioid overdoses are one of the leading causes of death in the United States. Nearly 92,000 persons in the U.S. died from a drug-involved overdose in 2020, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids. Naloxone can reverse an opioid overdose when given intranasally or intramuscularly. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identifies naloxone distribution as one of the top-three strategies for addressing the opioid epidemic. However, to be effective, naloxone must be available at the time of overdose. Naloxone distribution can save a life when first responders are not immediately available or when witnesses to overdoses are unwilling or unable to call 911.

Co-prescribing opioids and naloxone

For prescribers, the best strategies to prevent adverse events related to opioid prescribing are to:

1. co-prescribe naloxone with opioids; and
2. educate patients about the value of naloxone so that they fill the prescription.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the American Medical Association all recommend that physicians consider co-prescribing naloxone and opioids for high-risk patients, such as those with a history of overdose, history of substance use disorder, higher opioid dosages or concurrent benzodiazepine use. Several states currently mandate the co-prescription of naloxone with opioids, as noted in the Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association's [naloxone summary of state laws](#).

Patient and family education

Prescribing naloxone is critical, but ensuring the prescriptions are filled is equally important so that the patient has access to the medication when it is needed. Prescribers should provide education on the following when prescribing naloxone at discharge:

- importance of filling the prescription;

- risks and signs of overdose;
- where to get naloxone and its cost;
- how to store naloxone and what to do with expired naloxone;
- [how to use naloxone](#);
- [side effects of naloxone](#);
- available community programs; and
- discuss and address stigmas around recovery and programs such as medication-assisted treatment (MAT).

Stigma around opioids and naloxone prescriptions

Prescribers may have stigmas around prescribing naloxone, and patients may feel stigmatized filling the prescription. Below are resources to reduce the stigma barriers to care.

- [Recovery Research Institute Addictionary](#)
- [Understanding the stigma epidemic](#)

Citations and additional resources

1. [NIH overdose death rates](#)
2. [Expanding access to naloxone: A review of distribution strategies](#)
3. [HHS naloxone: The opioid reversal drug that saves lives](#)
4. [Pharmacist tips for benefits of naloxone](#)
5. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia have enacted standing orders to make naloxone hydrochloride available without a prescription. The [SAFE Project website](#) lists state-specific laws for naloxone standing orders at pharmacies.

Questions

Please contact [Cathleen Wright](#) or your [EQIC project manager](#) with any questions.

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