

Managing Pain and Reducing Opioid Use



In the past, prescription opioids (more commonly referred to as “painkillers” or “narcotics”) were considered “low-risk, non-addictive, effective treatments for moderate to severe pain.” However, according to the *2017 Canadian Guideline for Opioid Therapy and Chronic Non-Cancer Pain*, “opioids are associated with a 5.5% risk of addiction, when effective provide about a 30% reduction in pain, higher dosages are not more effective than lower dosages, and have been studied mostly for short-term use (less than one year).” These drugs are popular with many people because in addition to relieving pain, they can also produce a feeling of euphoria (a “high”). As our nation has become more aware of the dangers of opioid use, the Hamilton Family Health Team has put supports in place to help patients taking opioids.

Academic Detailing by Expert Pharmacists

Academic detailing is one of the most effective ways to educate prescribers with objective, balanced, evidence-based information on best practices about the use of medications. In the HFHT, our pharmacists are experts on opioids. They used the academic detailing approach to share important information on the safest way to help patients manage pain through one-on-one education sessions with our family physicians. They are also seeing patients in one-on-one visits to better manage people on opioids. This is done in a team approach working in collaboration with the family physician but also other healthcare professionals. This year, the pharmacists are focusing on reducing the dosage of opioids that people are taking to the safest and most appropriate amount while including alternative treatment approaches besides opioids to manage pain.

Pain and Opioids Management Support Team

We also have a team made up of a family physician and two pharmacists who send out easy-to-read, resource-rich newsletters to help healthcare providers make smart clinical choices when it comes to prescribing opioids or finding other ways to help patients manage pain.

Did you know? Team members at one of our practices, Core Care Family Health Team, have been working hard to support their patients taking opioids. One doctor and her team were able to put together a list of all patients prescribed opioids, identify the patients who were at highest risk and put supports in place to discontinue or reduce opioids while still effectively managing patients’ pain. Way to go team!

