



Pharmacist guidelines for assessing and monitoring individuals using opioid medications

Pharmacists are frontline health providers working closely with individuals prescribed opiates. They are often the most accessible members of an individual's healthcare team and play a vital role in their medication assessment and management. This includes many strategies including harm reduction.

It is essential that pharmacists adequately assess and monitor individuals using opioid medications and work collaboratively with their health teams to effectively manage their pain and minimize harm.

The Alberta College of Pharmacy developed guidelines in 2017 to align with similar guidelines from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA).

For more information about the college or these guidelines, please visit the Alberta College of Pharmacy website at:

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Understanding your pharmacist's role in assessing medication risk



Your pharmacist plays a vital role in medication assessment and management. What does this mean for you?

Pharmacists consider your condition, symptoms, medications, laboratory results, lifestyle factors, and treatment alternatives to make sure your medication is appropriate, effective, and safe for you.



Why is my pharmacist asking me about my medications?



Among other things, your pharmacist is here to support you to manage your drug therapy. To determine if drug therapy is safe and effective for you, they consider a variety of information including

- the conditions you are treated for,
- the symptoms you are experiencing,
- medications you are taking,
- laboratory results,
- lifestyle factors, and
- treatment options.

Pharmacists are an important part of your healthcare team, and as outlined in our *Standards of Practice for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians*, they work collaboratively with other health professionals, such as physicians, to help ensure you receive the most appropriate treatment for you. Often, this includes discussion about other health and lifestyle measures. Sometimes, the answer may be not using medications at all.

Your pharmacist's goal is to ensure that you get the right medications to achieve your health goals and support you in using them properly, while minimizing the possibility and impact of unwanted effects.



Is my pharmacist qualified to determine the safety and effectiveness of my medications?



Yes. Your pharmacist is your medication management expert. They are licensed, regulated healthcare professionals. Their knowledge, combined with their access to your medication and health history, puts them in the best position to ensure your treatment is safe, effective, and appropriate, and identify potential drug interactions or allergic reactions.



I've heard a lot about opioids lately. Why are opioid medications a concern?



Opioid medications are used to treat certain types of severe pain, such as pain resulting from trauma, surgery, or cancer. There may be other alternatives that work better than opioids or have less risk associated with them. If opioids are not needed, they should be avoided, as the longer they are taken, the more risk may be associated with them. Anyone taking an opioid medication can develop dependence over time. This is a known risk of the medication, and is **not the fault** of individuals using them.

If you require additional privacy when discussing your health and medication needs, you may ask to have the discussion in a private location at the pharmacy.



What is my pharmacist's role in my opioid therapy?



Your pharmacist's role is to ensure your opioid therapy is both effective and safe. They are a part of your healthcare team and work with your prescriber and other healthcare professionals to ensure you are getting optimal treatment for your condition.

If you are prescribed opioid therapy, it is your pharmacist's responsibility to

- build and maintain a professional relationship with you which includes treating you respectfully and providing information and education on opioid therapy,
- ensure your drug treatment is safe and appropriate by conducting and documenting medication assessments,
- collaborate with your prescriber and other members of your healthcare team,
- work with you throughout your treatment and help monitor your progress and symptoms, and
- identify and minimize risks associated with your drug therapy.