

Policy Solutions to the Opioid Crisis

Co-sponsor the John S. McCain Opioid Addiction Prevention Act (H.R. 1614 / S. 724) to Establish 7-Day Supply Limits for Initial Opioid Prescriptions for Acute Pain

Background

Every day, pharmacists face a moment of truth when presented with an opioid prescription, making decisions as a provider of patient care and as part of the solution to the drug abuse crisis.

Per the CDC, a greater amount of opioid exposure increases the risk of long-term use and addiction. Notably, the average day supply per opioid prescription has increased in recent years, from 13.3 to 18.1 days per prescription between 2006 and 2016. Considering this trend and the risk of exposure to higher amounts of opioids, lawmakers must adopt policies to promote careful prescribing practices for prescription opioids.

Enactment of 7-day supply limits for acute opioid prescriptions is supported by the CDC prescribing guidelines, as it helps reduce the incidence of misuse, abuse, and overdose of these drugs. So far, over 30 states have adopted laws or other policies limiting the maximum day supply that can be authorized on an initial opioid prescription for acute pain.

Recommendation

Chain pharmacy encourages Congress to support H.R. 1614 / S. 724, which would limit initial opioid prescriptions for acute pain to no more than a 7-day supply, and, further,

- Maintains that if pain continues, the prescriber may issue, as appropriate, a new prescription.
- Accommodates appropriate exemptions to limits. Including, prescriptions for chronic pain; pain being treated as a part of cancer care, hospice, or other end-of-life care; pain being treated as part of palliative care practices; and prescriptions issued for medications used to treat opioid addiction; and,
- Ensures that pharmacies are not required to enforce practitioner prescribing, and are provided certain practical exceptions to limits.

Additional Policy Solutions

NACDS members have implemented extensive pharmacy initiatives that serve to reduce the incidence of controlled substance diversion and abuse, including DEA compliance programs; pioneering e-prescribing; drug disposal options for consumers; pharmacist and patient education; pharmacy security initiatives; fostering naloxone access; stopping illegal online drug-sellers and rogue clinics; and more. The chain pharmacy community is committed to pursuing additional enduring policy solutions to reduce the incidence of opioid addiction and abuse. In addition to legislating a 7-Day Limit, NACDS supports the following policy solutions to the Opioid Crisis:

- (1) requiring that all prescriptions be issued electronically with limited exceptions;
- (2) collaboration with stakeholders on a nationwide prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) database; and
- (3) providing manufacturer-funded mail-back envelopes for unused opioid drugs, available to patients at pharmacies upon request.

March 2019