

# Taking Care: The Pharmacist's Role in Caring for Patients with Pain

Tools to Bring Patients  
and Pharmacists Together



Pain is a major health and economic issue in the United States and the number one cause of adult disability.<sup>1</sup> Did you know that:

- › There are currently more than 100 million Americans suffering from chronic pain, including 65% to 80% of terminal cancer patients, 62% of nursing home residents, and many others who must manage pain on a daily basis.<sup>1</sup>
- › Chronic pain affects more people than diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and cancer combined.<sup>2</sup>
- › Pain costs an estimated \$560 billion to \$635 billion annually in lost workdays, medical expenses, and other benefit costs.<sup>1</sup>
- › Unrelieved pain can result in longer hospital stays, increased rates of rehospitalization, increased outpatient visits, and decreased ability to function fully leading to lost income and insurance coverage.
- › Unrelieved chronic pain problems often result in an inability for patients to work and maintain health insurance.<sup>2</sup>

Patients with pain often face significant barriers and disparities to achieving pain control, such as poor reimbursement, lack of adequate training of health care professionals, system and organizational barriers, cultural attitudes about pain, and stereotyping and societal biases.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, it has been estimated that over 40 percent of patients with chronic pain experience uncontrolled pain.

This toolkit will provide you, the pharmacist, with information and resources to help enhance and support your communications with your patients with pain.<sup>4</sup>

## Bringing Patients with Pain and Pharmacists Together

The American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA) and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) have come together in a spirit of collaboration to maximize our collective experience, knowledge, and expertise to help raise awareness and build meaningful partnerships between people with pain and the pharmacists that care for them. As pharmacists, you know that your involvement in the pain management treatment team is beneficial to patients. However, some patients may not have experience working with a pharmacist taking an active role in pain management. You can help them recognize, appreciate and seek out the support you provide!

A recent survey conducted jointly by the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and the American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA) showed that almost 13% of prescriptions filled in the United States are for a medication used to treat pain. Some of these medications

are intended for acute pain, while others are intended to help manage chronic pain. For patients with pain, having a strong, collaborative relationship with their pharmacist can be an invaluable resource.

As pharmacists, it can sometimes be challenging to manage the requirements of your workplace and the legal and regulatory restrictions that come with dispensing medications used to treat pain. The reality is that for many patients with pain, it can be overwhelming to try and manage their medications. Pharmacists have a tremendous role to play in coaching and supporting patients with pain. Did you know that over 91% of patients with pain use the same pharmacy? That means the patients who need your help are already using your pharmacy! Take the opportunity to know your patients with pain and understand the ways that you can partner with them to help and support them.

There also may be things you may not realize about your patients with pain. Not surprisingly, they trust you! Over 90 percent of patients believe that their pharmacist is knowledgeable about medications used to treat pain and 76 percent consider their pharmacist a part of their health care team. Forty-three percent would like to speak with their pharmacist more about their pain and treatment options.

## Just Ask Me! I Want to Help!

Helping patients make the best use of medications is likely why you became a pharmacist. Pharmacists can have varied roles in helping patients manage pain. In some cases, pharmacists provide patient counseling when

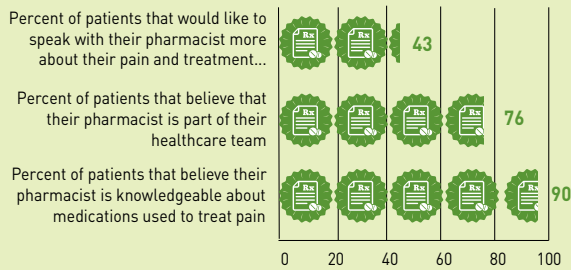
<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine Report from the Committee on Advancing Pain Research, Care, and Education: *Relieving Pain in America, A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education and Research*. The National Academies Press, 2011. Accessed at [http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record\\_id=13172&page=1](http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13172&page=1) on November 1, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The American Academy of Pain Medicine. AAPM Facts and Figures on Pain. Accessed at [http://www.painmed.org/patientcenter/facts\\_on\\_pain.aspx#burden](http://www.painmed.org/patientcenter/facts_on_pain.aspx#burden) on November 1, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Craig DS. Introduction: pharmacist role in pain management. *Journal of Pharmacy Practice*. 2012; 25(5) 496.

<sup>4</sup> American Pain Society. Chronic pain in America: Roadblocks to relief. Accessed at [www.doctordeluca.com/Library/Pain/ChronicPainRoadblocks.htm](http://www.doctordeluca.com/Library/Pain/ChronicPainRoadblocks.htm) on November 1, 2015.

## Patients and Their Pharmacists



patients fill prescriptions. In others, pharmacists may be intimately involved in the assessment, management, and pharmacotherapy of patients with pain. Each pharmacist's practice setting, training and experience will determine the degree of involvement in the patient's care.

### Role of the Pharmacist in Pain Management

According to the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), pharmacists have a vital role in ensuring safe and effective pain management, as they are often the first point of contact for patients seeking non-prescription analgesics and advice regarding prescription analgesics. To effectively partner with patients to assist in pain management, you must have an understanding of the epidemiology of pain, pain mechanisms, frequently encountered pain conditions, variables which influence the patients' perception of and response to pain, valid and reliable methods of clinical pain assessment, and both pharmacological and non-pharmacological methods for pain relief.<sup>5</sup> Keep the following principles in mind when assisting patients with pain:

- 】 Pain is multidimensional with psychosocial, behavioral, spiritual, and genetic variables
- 】 Patients have the right to safe and effective pain control
- 】 Pharmacists are an integral and accountable part of the care of the patient in pain<sup>6</sup>

Pharmacists can help patients live meaningful and productive lives with adequately managed pain.<sup>6</sup> When pharmacists provide education to their patients with pain, patients experience a decrease in the incidence of adverse events and improvements in their satisfaction with care.<sup>7</sup> You can help patients understand the appropriate use of the medication and periodically assess them to ensure that pain management goals are being adequately met.

Results of the *Patient Survey – Relationship with Your Pharmacist* conducted in 2014 by APhA and ACPA clearly

show that pharmacists would like to speak more to patients about their pain and treatment options; however, patients don't always see the value in speaking with their pharmacist. Some of the reasons identified in the survey include:

- 】 Patients don't know what questions to ask the pharmacist
- 】 Patients perceive the pharmacist as being too busy
- 】 Patients may have had a previous interaction with a pharmacist that was not positive.

### Engaging Patients with Pain

Let's talk about ways that you can serve as an integral member of your patient's health care team and best support a patient with pain. Some easy ways you can help are to:

- 】 Listen to your patients and ask questions to help you better understand their needs and challenges in treating their pain
- 】 Help patients better understand the medications they take to treat pain, both prescription and over-the-counter, by reviewing appropriate use and answering their questions
- 】 Discuss non-medication techniques and strategies with patients to help them manage their pain
- 】 Be an advocate and a partner when communicating with prescribers

The best way to begin a relationship with a patient with pain is to initiate a conversation with him or her. Here are some discussion points that may be important to patients:

- 】 Reinforce that it is important to use one pharmacy for all medications. This simple step can help avoid harmful drug interactions and ensure that you have a chance to consult with your patient when they come to the pharmacy.
- 】 Let patients know that while it may be true that you work in a very busy pharmacy, you have time for them! Let patients know that they can call to make an appointment to speak with you, and let your patients know if there are times of the day that may be better for you to meet with them or talk on the telephone.
- 】 Ask patients to inform you about all the medications that they may be taking, including over-the-counter medications, dietary and herbal supplements.
- 】 Help patients understand how each medication is to be taken, including how often and when to take the medication, whether or not to take it with food, what to avoid while taking the medications, and any potential

<sup>6</sup> Barbee, J., Chessher, J., and Greenlee, M. Pain Management: The Pharmacist's Evolving Role. *Pharmacy Times*. July 13, 2015. Accessed at <http://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/health-system-edition/2015/july2015/pain-management-the-pharmacists-evolving-role> on November 1, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett MI, Bagnall AM, Raine G, Closs SJ, Blenkinsopp A, Dickman A, Ellershaw J. Educational interventions by pharmacists to patients with chronic pain: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clin J Pain*. 2011 Sep;27(7):623-30.

side effects. You can use the Pharmacist Care Card, provided on page 5, to facilitate this conversation.

- Reassure patients that the reason you may ask certain questions is to help them, and when you have the information, you are able to help ensure that they are taking their medications safely and effectively.

In May 2014, the Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners (JCPP) developed and approved the Pharmacists' Patient Care Process. The elements of this process apply to caring for patients with pain. The essential first step is the establishment of a patient-pharmacist relationship that supports engagement and effective communication with patients, families and caregivers throughout the process. The principles of evidence-based practice for pharmacists include:<sup>8</sup>

- Collect** – The pharmacist assures the collection of the necessary subjective and objective information about the patient in order to understand the relevant medical/medication history and clinical status of the patient.
- Assess** – The pharmacist assesses the information collected and analyzes the clinical effects of the patient's therapy in the context of the patient's overall health goals in order to identify and prioritize problems and achieve optimal care.
- Plan** – The pharmacist develops an individualized patient-centered care plan that is evidence-based and cost-effective, in collaboration with other health care professionals and the patient or caregiver.
- Implement** – The pharmacist implements the care plan in collaboration with other health care professionals and the patient or caregiver.
- Follow-up: Monitor and Evaluate** – The pharmacist monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the care plan and modifies the plan in collaboration with other health care professionals and the patient or caregiver as needed.

By applying the elements of the Pharmacists' Patient Care Process to your interactions with patients with pain, you can leverage your expertise and training in the appropriate use of medications, reduce adverse drug events, improve patient safety, and optimize medication use and health outcomes for your patients. Use the tools and resources provided below to help plan effective and meaningful interactions with your patients.

## Tools to Support Pharmacist Interactions with Patients

### Ability Chart

Having pain can make the simplest everyday tasks difficult. This tool can help patients explain to you how climbing stairs, getting out of a chair, or bathing might be challenging. This tool allows patients to identify the areas where they struggle and how much trouble they

have with each item. Instruct patients to simply circle their level of difficulty with each item. Pharmacists can then take the time to discuss each response and make recommendations or referrals as needed. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail image or clicking on this url. <https://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/ACPA-AbilityChart.pdf>

### Quality of Life Scale

The American Chronic Pain Association Quality of Life Scale can support pharmacists to understand, evaluate and communicate the impact of pain on the basic activities of daily life. Understanding how pain may be interfering with quality of life for patients can provide a basis for

more effective treatment and help to measure progress over time. Use this tool to directly engage with your patients about how pain impacts their quality of life. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail image or clicking on this url. [http://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/Life\\_Scale\\_3.pdf](http://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/Life_Scale_3.pdf)

### Pharmacist Care Card

This graphical tool can help your patients understand how each medication is to be taken, what to avoid while taking the medication as well as potential side effects. Use this as a guide to help customize your counseling points for any patient who has been prescribed pain medications. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail

<sup>8</sup> Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners. Pharmacists' Patient Care Process. May 29, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.pharmacist.com/sites/default/files/files/PatientCareProcess.pdf> on November 1, 2015.

image or clicking on this url. [https://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/ACPACareCard-2009\\_ Revised.pdf](https://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/ACPACareCard-2009_ Revised.pdf)

### Opioid Induced Constipation Conversation Guide

Having to live with chronic pain is difficult enough without the added burden of opioid-induced constipation. As pharmacists know, this is a serious side effect for patients taking opioid medications and can be

sensitive to discuss. This tool can facilitate a meaningful conversation with your patient. Encourage your patients taking opioid medications to complete this tool, discuss their responses and provide suggestions for ways to minimize or resolve this side effect. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail image or clicking on this url. [https://theacpa.org/uploads/ACPA-Opioid\\_Constipation\\_Chart-V4.pdf](https://theacpa.org/uploads/ACPA-Opioid_Constipation_Chart-V4.pdf)

### Follow-Up From Your Visit

This tool can allow patients the opportunity to share with you what they have been advised by their prescriber. Understanding the complete treatment plan can help the pharmacist better support patients with pain. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail image or

clicking on this url. <http://theacpa.org/uploads/documents/ACPA%20Follow-Up%20V-5.pdf>

### Interactive Pain Log

ACPA has developed an interactive tool to help patients track their pain and work to determine if there are certain patterns that can provide clues on

daily activities or situations that could be modified to help better manage or reduce pain. You can access this tool by clicking on the thumbnail image or clicking on this url. <http://theacpa.org/painLog/default.aspx>



#### Additional Resources for Pharmacists and Patients in Pain

- ▶ The American Chronic Pain Association offers peer support and education in pain management skills to people with pain, family, friends and health care professionals. Their website provides a wealth of information at <http://theacpa.org/default.aspx>.
- ▶ The American Pharmacists Association provides the latest information, education and guidance for managing patients with pain. Please go to APhA's online Opioid Resource Center at [www.pharmacist.com](http://www.pharmacist.com)
- ▶ The American Academy of Pain Medicine has a number of patient education materials and other resources that may be useful in your practice. You can access this information at <http://www.painmed.org/patientcenter/patient-education/>.
- ▶ The American Society of Pain Educators is focused on improving pain management through the education and training of health care professionals. Visit their website at <http://www.paineducators.org/> for educational materials, resources and links to ACPE approved CPE activities.