

April 8, 2019

COM-2019-015

Dear provider of pharmaceutical services,

The United States (U.S.) and its territories currently face an opioid crisis with tremendous human and healthcare costs. Opioids are highly addictive drugs which have been subject to increased prescription patterns, leading to misuse of these drugs. As a result, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency in 2017 and announced a strategy to combat the opioid crisis. According to the CDC more than 700,000 people died between 1999 and 2017 from a drug overdose. In 2017, 68% of the 70,200 drug overdose deaths were attributed to opioids, while the National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that 21-29% of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain management misuse them.^{2,4} In response to the opioid crisis, the HHS is focusing its efforts on five major priorities: improving access to treatment and recovery services, promoting use of overdose-reversing drugs, strengthening understanding of the epidemic through better public health surveillance, providing support for cutting-edge research on pain and addiction, and advancing better practices for pain management.

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist which competes with and displaces opioids at opioid receptor sites, reversing respiratory depression and potentially preventing death in opioid overdose, making it a useful tool in combating opioid overdose. On March 6, 2019, the Secretary of the Department of Health of Puerto Rico, Rafael Rodríguez Mercado, authorized the sale without medical prescription of intranasal and auto-injectable naloxone at community pharmacies via Administrative Order 402, in order to provide rapid access to a drug whose availability could make the difference between life and death. Naloxone is to be sold only to patients 18 years of age or older who present a valid form of state identification. Pharmacies must keep a confidential record of naloxone sales which they must present at routine inspections. Furthermore, Administrative Order 402 states that first responders must be trained in the use of naloxone and may keep the drug in officially licensed vehicles. As per Administrative Order 402, all pharmacies which sell naloxone must also notify the Puerto Rico Department of Health through the “Secretaría Auxiliar para Reglamentación y Acreditación de Facilidades de Salud” (SARAF) pharmacy division, which will keep an easily accessible registry of all establishments selling the drug.

While current efforts largely aim to educate and modify prescribing patterns, appropriate management of opioid overdose is of great concern as well.

Identifying an Opioid Overdose

Signs to lookout for an opioid overdose include:

- Slow or no breathing
- Slow or no pulse
- Cyanosis
- Unresponsiveness
- Eyes rolled back

Response to Opioid Overdose

Upon identification of opioid overdose, an attempt should be made to wake the user, shaking the person if necessary. If the person fails to respond, call **911**. Provide rescue breathing and administer naloxone, if available.

- Rescue breathing
 - Tilt the person's head back, pinching their nose and give two breaths every 5 seconds.
- Naloxone administration
 - For injectable naloxone:
 - Inject 1cc into the upper arm or thigh.
 - For intranasal naloxone:
 - Administer one spray in each nostril.
- Naloxone wears off between 30 and 90 minutes. The user may need a second dose after this period. Further management should be provided by emergency services.

It is of utmost importance that, as provider of pharmaceutical services, you comply with all the stipulations of Administrative Order 402 in order to maximize the benefits associated to this order and avoid potential sanctions. We exhort you to review the full Administrative Order 402, which is available at:

<http://www.cfpr.org/files/Orden%20Adm%20402-rotated.pdf>

You can find more information related to the opioid crisis, opioid overdose deaths, and strategies for the management of these issues in the website of the CDC

(<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>), as well as in other trustworthy sources..

On PharmPix we are compromised with the health and wellness of our insured. It is our priority to offer high quality services and to promote practices for health promotion and diseases prevention. If you have any doubt or wish to have more information regarding this document, you can call us to 787-522-5252, extension 137.

Regards,

Pharmacy Department

References:

- 1) What is the U.S. Opioid Epidemic?. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids/about-the-epidemic/index.html>
- 2) Understanding the Epidemic | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>
- 3) Training Tools. (2019). Retrieved from <http://naloxoneinfo.org/run-program/training-tools>
- 4) Opioid Overdose Crisis. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>