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New Report Tackles Methadone Analgesia Safety Concerns

Pain Treatment Topics identifies methadone as effective and safe, provides guidance on prescribing and patient-use for preventing methadone-associated overdoses and deaths.

Glenview, IL; November 2006 – Methadone, a synthetic opioid analgesic, has demonstrated an excellent record of effectiveness and safety during the more than 60 years since its development. Oral methadone can provide potent and economical relief of the most severe acute or chronic pain, even when other pain relievers – opioid or non-opioid – fail to do so.

Although millions of patients have been successfully treated daily with the medication, reports of methadone-associated overdoses and deaths continue to appear in the news, often describing methadone as a widely abused and dangerous drug. This has caused apprehension among healthcare providers and patients alike. Yet, most of the tragedies surrounding the misuse and abuse of oral methadone, typically in tablet form, could be prevented by a greater understanding of how to safely prescribe it among healthcare providers and by better education of patients.

A new, 14-page, peer-reviewed report from *Pain Treatment Topics* -- ***Methadone Analgesia Safety Overview & Patient Instructions Handout*** -- provides essential background information and serves as a gateway to several unique, evidence-based documents at Pain-Topics.com. These guide healthcare providers in more safely and effectively prescribing methadone analgesia:

- Safely Dosing Methadone for Chronic Pain
- Avoiding Harmful Methadone-Drug Interactions
- Methadone Cardiac Considerations and Precautions

Additionally, the “Overview” links to documents discussing the management of opioid-induced constipation, a common side effect, and how to safely discontinue opioid analgesics.

The proper education of patients, and their families or caretakers, to ensure therapeutic compliance and safety is addressed in a first-of-its-kind “Patient Instructions Handout” attached to

the “Overview” document. Healthcare providers can reproduce this 2-page handout and give it to patients whenever methadone analgesia is prescribed. In plain language, the handout tells how to prevent harmful misuse and adverse events potentially associated with methadone.

According to Stewart B. Leavitt, MA, PhD – *Pain Treatment Topics* Publisher/Editor and author of the report – “The nonmedical, illicit use of prescription opioids, in general, is a large and growing problem. It is a frequent cause of unintentional drug-poisoning fatalities.”

“Methadone is often implicated in these cases; however, it must be appreciated that methadone is a unique opioid and must be properly prescribed. For example, it can build up in the blood during a number of days even at the same dose; therefore, the general rule is to start the dose low, increase it slowly, and gradually titrate to desired effect,” Leavitt says.

“Along with that, it is absolutely essential that patients, and their families or caretakers, understand the necessity of rigid compliance with therapy. For example, patients cannot take extra doses if the pain relief seems inadequate, or mix it with other medications. Methadone-associated overdoses or deaths usually also involve multiple drugs such as alcohol, benzodiazepines, and other opioids in a ‘poison cocktail.’”

“Additionally, patients need to know the importance of safeguarding their methadone from pilferage and illicit use by others. This medication cannot be stored on kitchen counters or in unlocked medicine cabinets, as other drugs might be.”

Leavitt concludes, “The preponderance of scientific evidence indicates that methadone is a highly effective analgesic, it is very economical, and it is safe when properly prescribed and used. This new Overview report and Handout provide the tools to help ensure those objectives.”

The *Methadone Analgesia Safety Overview & Patient Instructions Handout* can be accessed at the ‘Opioid Rx’ section of Pain-Topics.com, see: http://www.pain-topics.com/opioid_rx/index.php. This is an open-access website providing evidence-based clinical news, information, research, and education on the causes and effective treatment of the many types of pain conditions. It is independently produced and currently funded by an unrestricted educational grant from Mallinckrodt Inc., St. Louis, MO, a leading manufacturer of generic opioid analgesic products.

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