

Patients need timely access to pain management—including opioids

Drug Programs Update

Although they carry an appreciative level of risk, opioid medications can be essential for many treatment plans. It is the responsibility of registrants to understand when to best use these medications appropriately and effectively. Opioids are not always warranted; however, it would be unethical and inappropriate for registrants to have a blanket policy to not prescribe opioids in any circumstance.

Pain management can often be a challenging area of practice, but it is a core competency of medicine and a treatment option that all registrants are expected to safely provide to their patients when indicated.

The College regularly receives communication from specialists expressing concerns that primary care physicians are hesitant to provide opioid treatment for pain management to their patients. The demand for symptom management for vulnerable patients continues to rise, stretching pain and palliative care resources thin. In response, the College expects registrants to engage in effective partnerships with pain physicians, oncologists, and with palliative care physicians to provide timely

responses to the legitimate therapeutic needs of their patients.

All registrants play a part in ensuring safe and timely care for patients suffering pain.

Additionally, refusing to provide certain basic aspects of care to patients, particularly those with complex pain needs, can be seen as a breach of the College's [Access to Medical Care Without Discrimination](#) practice standard. Patients undergoing cancer treatment or receiving palliative/end-of-life care are especially vulnerable in this instance as their medication needs are often higher than others. To avoid discrimination and patient abandonment, it is essential to offer support and prescribe the right medications to patients in need. The standard emphasizes that a defined scope of practice must not be used as a means of unreasonably refusing care to patients with complex health needs.

The College has made the [ordering process for duplicate pads](#) easily accessible on the College website, ensuring supply and minimizing possible delays in patient care.

Continuous learning

All registrants providing patient care must be able to manage pain in their patient population and undertake continuous learning on the topic relevant to their practice. The College sets out its expectations for registrants in [Safe Prescribing of Opioids and Sedatives](#) practice standard.

[Other resources](#) are available from the Drug Programs on the College website.