



NEWS RELEASE

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AMDA and Other Medical Societies Develop Tip Sheet on Controlled Substance Prescribing

Columbia, MD – Medical societies seeking to ensure compassionate and high quality care for long term care patients joined together recently to develop a “Tip Sheet on Prescribing for Controlled Substances in Long Term Care.” The groups involved are AMDA—Dedicated to Long Term Care Medicine, the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), and the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM). The tip sheet is designed to assist physicians and other prescribers in their efforts to ensure proper controlled substances prescribing in long term care, and deal with aggressive enforcement actions by Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents.

“We, in long term care, have had to modify longstanding procedures in an effort to ensure compliance with DEA rules. The changes forced on us have delayed dispensing of controlled substances to long term care facility residents who urgently need them,” says Meenakshi Patel, MD, FACP, MMM, CMD, Director of Geriatrics, Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, OH, and an AMDA member who worked on developing the tip sheet. To help prescribers comply with current law in a manner that will smooth the way for more expeditious dispensing of the controlled substances they prescribe for their patients, AMDA—working in partnership with other national organizations—developed this tip sheet as part of priority efforts to address DEA-related issues. These groups have joined together to advocate strongly for Congress and the DEA to change the rules to allow for the longstanding practice of having nurses act as the physician’s agent.

“The American Medical Association is collaborating with other organizations to advocate for changes in DEA rules and regulations governing the prescription of controlled substances in long term care facilities,” says Cecil Wilson, MD, President of the American Medical Association. “However, revising laws and regulations can be a long and complex process, and physicians must ensure their patients’ current health needs are addressed. We hope that this tip sheet will help physicians provide patients with prompt access to necessary medications.”

Cheryl Phillips, MD, CMD, AGS Board Chair, notes, “Currently, DEA interpretation of the existing regulation means that patients are going without needed pain relief. This simply should not be happening.” She adds, “We believe it’s essential that practitioners have information about complying with the DEA regulations, and so we worked collaboratively to develop this tip sheet. A long-term solution must be found, and we are encouraged by the deep interest of Congressional leaders, including Senate Special Committee on Aging Chairman Herb Kohl, in this issue. AGS believes that revising the law to recognize that nurses, pharmacists, and physicians in the nursing home setting—just as in the hospital—are working together will ensure that all patients receive high quality care,” Phillips adds.

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The tip sheet stresses, “The number one tip is, whenever possible, write the prescription yourself.” It further suggests ways prescribers can expedite filling of controlled substance prescriptions. These include always carrying a prescription pad that meets state requirements, knowing legal requirements for a controlled substance prescription, writing a prescription at a facility that has a fax machine and faxing the prescription to the provider pharmacy, purchasing a home fax for after hours and weekend calls, and—in emergency situations when faxing isn’t an option and a prescription pad is unavailable—calling the pharmacist directly with the order in addition to giving this information to the nurse.

“Especially when treating patients facing serious, life-limiting illness, there is no time to waste in providing needed medications,” says R. Sean Morrison, MD, AAHPM President. Promoting regulatory policies that ensure timely access to prescription medications—including certain federally-controlled substances, such as opioid analgesics—for patients with medically appropriate indications is one of AAHPM’s top advocacy priorities. “By helping physicians and other prescribers navigate DEA requirements, these guidelines are key to ensuring our members do not unintentionally impede care of vulnerable patients.”

Elsewhere, the document urges practitioners to “reach out” to local hospital staff so that patients who require controlled substances are discharged with a hard copy prescription for a few days’ worth of the needed medication. The prescription should specify the drug but also state “or formulary equivalent.”

“This tip sheet is an excellent summary of what we prescribers need to know and do to assure that our patients don’t ‘fall through the cracks’ until we can get better laws and regulations,” says AMDA Past-President Jonathan Musher, MD, CMD, one of the physicians who helped develop the document. He adds, “I applaud AMDA and the other organizations for taking the lead on helping to advocate for better laws and regulations around the prescribing of controlled substances.”

On completion, the tip sheet went out to AMDA members via e-mail. It also will appear in the association’s Weekly Round Up that is e-mailed to all members each Friday, and there will be a link to the document on AMDA’s Web site (www.amda.com) and the newly created DEA page (<http://www.amda.com/advocacy/dea/tipv2.pdf>). AMDA also announced the tip sheet availability to state chapter leaders via conference call, enabling them an opportunity to distribute the document to members locally.

The American Medical Directors Association (AMDA) is the national professional association of medical directors, attending physicians, and other professionals practicing long term care medicine committed to the continuous improvement of patient care. The organization provides education, advocacy, information, and professional development for medical directors and other practitioners from various disciplines working together to deliver quality long term care.

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