

# Education for patients on opioids

BIDMC Opioid Care Committee, Patient Education Subcommittee  
 Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston

## Introduction/Problem

The Opioid Care Committee (OCC) was formed to ensure best practices and a comprehensive approach at BIDMC to: safe prescribing of opioids, use of alternative therapies for pain management, and treatment of opioid use disorder. This includes ensuring compliance with federal and state regulatory requirements regarding opioid management.

The Patient Education Subcommittee focused on how to use print materials to support point-of-care education for patients being prescribed an opioid medication.

We reviewed available fact sheets on parameters of readability, tone, content, and appearance, as well as whether the information within the fact sheet was action-oriented. We did not find a fact sheet that met desired standards on all of these parameters. The committee determined that we needed to create our own fact sheet.

## Aim/Goal

- The Patient Education Subcommittee's main task was to create a patient education fact sheet that met regulatory requirements and was in line with the OCC's goal of best practices. The envisioned end product was a fact sheet with the following key features:
- Lower literacy level than other fact sheets we had reviewed
  - Includes information on common and serious side effects
  - Addresses alternative pain management methods
  - Includes action items
  - Achieves a tone of information-sharing vs. alarm: makes patients aware of risks without discouraging them from taking needed medicine
  - Easily accessible to clinicians in disparate areas

## The Team

- Leads: Beatrice Ford & Jane Wandel
- Leslie Bosworth
- Tricia Bourie
- Nancy Kasen
- Emily Keenan
- Jennifer Kritz
- Caroline Moore
- Kathy Murray
- Dan Nadworny
- Kelly Orlando
- Julie Rockwell
- Barbara Sarnoff

## The Interventions

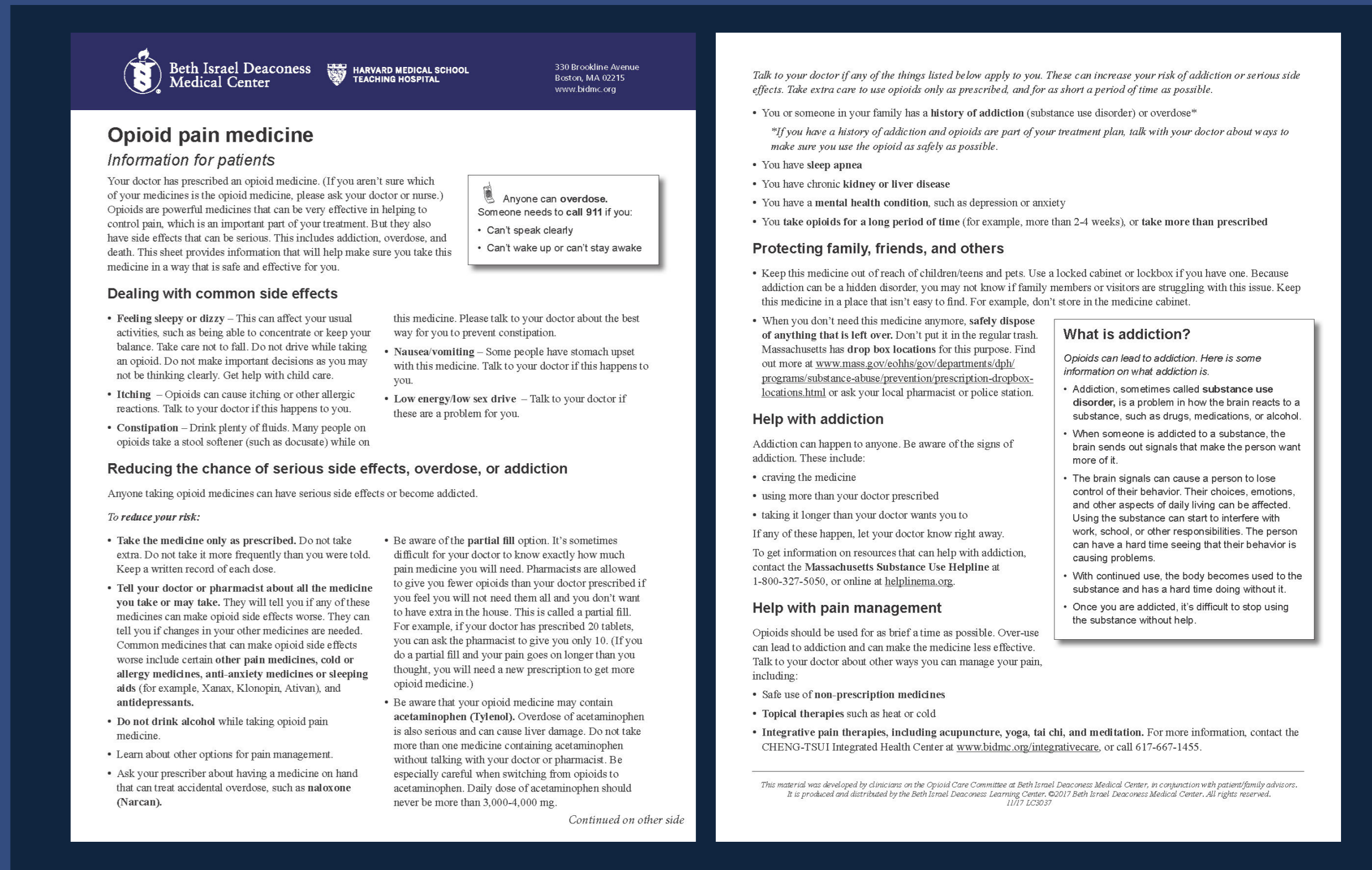
- Our process – draft iteration, including detailed input from 14 patient/family advisors as well as clinicians specializing in addiction treatment, pain management, emergency care, medicine, surgery, social work, nursing, and anesthesia
- Determined all the touch points at BIDMC where the fact sheet needed to/should be given to patients and by what means
- Placed the sheet in the BIDMC forms inventory at Allied
- Partnered with Communications to develop a communication strategy to inform clinicians that fact sheet was available, giving guidance on when to use and how to order

For more information, contact:  
 Beatrice Ford, bford@bidmc.harvard.edu;  
 Jane Wandel, RN, jwandel@bidmc.harvard.edu

## Results/Progress to Date

- Flesch-Kincaid reading level = grade 8.4, down from grade 14.2 in original working draft
- Conforms to understandability and actionability standards outlined in the PEMAT-P\* evaluation tool
- Over 3,600 fact sheets have been distributed to inpatient and outpatient areas since launch

\*PMAT-P = Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool for Printable Materials



**Opioid pain medicine**  
 Information for patients

Your doctor has prescribed an opioid medicine. (If you aren't sure which of your medicines is the opioid medicine, please ask your doctor or nurse.) Opioids are powerful medicines that can be very effective in helping to control pain, which is an important part of your treatment. But they also have side effects that can be serious. This includes addiction, overdose, and death. This sheet provides information that will help make sure you take this medicine in a way that is safe and effective for you.

**Anyone can overdose.**  
 Someone needs to call 911 if you:

- Can't speak clearly
- Can't wake up or can't stay awake

**Dealing with common side effects**

- **Feeling sleepy or dizzy** – This can affect your usual activities, such as being able to concentrate or keep your balance. Take care not to fall. Do not drive while taking an opioid. Do not make important decisions as you may not be thinking clearly. Get help with child care.
- **Itching** – Opioids can cause itching or other allergic reactions. Talk to your doctor if this happens to you.
- **Constipation** – Drink plenty of fluids. Many people on opioids take a stool softener (such as docusate) while on this medicine. Please talk to your doctor about the best way for you to prevent constipation.
- **Nausea/vomiting** – Some people have stomach upset with this medicine. Talk to your doctor if this happens to you.
- **Low energy/low sex drive** – Talk to your doctor if these are a problem for you.

**Reducing the chance of serious side effects, overdose, or addiction**

Anyone taking opioid medicines can have serious side effects or become addicted.

**To reduce your risk:**

- **Take the medicine only as prescribed.** Do not take extra. Do not take it more frequently than you were told. Keep a written record of each dose.
- **Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicine you take or may take.** They will tell you if any of these medicines can make opioid side effects worse. They can tell you if changes in your other medicines are needed. Common medicines that can make opioid side effects worse include certain other pain medicines, cold or allergy medicines, and anxiety medicines or sleeping aids. (For example, Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan, and antidepressants.)
- **Do not drink alcohol** while taking opioid pain medicine.
- **Learn about other options** for pain management.
- **Ask your prescriber about having a medicine on hand** that can treat accidental overdose, such as naloxone (Narcan).
- **Be aware of the partial fill option.** It's sometimes difficult for your doctor to know exactly how much pain medicine you will need. Pharmacists are allowed to give you fewer opioids than your doctor prescribed if you feel you will not need them all and you don't want to have extra in the home. This is called a partial fill. For example, if your doctor has prescribed 20 tablets, you can ask the pharmacist to give you only 10. (If you do a partial fill and your pain goes on longer than you thought, you will need a new prescription to get more opioid medicine.)
- **Be aware that your opioid medicine may contain acetaminophen (Tylenol).** Overdose of acetaminophen is also serious and can cause liver damage. Do not take more than one medicine containing acetaminophen without talking with your doctor or pharmacist. Be especially careful when switching from opioids to acetaminophen. Daily dose of acetaminophen should never be more than 3,000-4,000 mg.

*Continued on other side*

**Protecting family, friends, and others**

- Keep this medicine out of reach of children/teens and pets. Use a locked cabinet or lockbox if you have one. Because addiction can be a hidden disorder, you may not know if family members or visitors are struggling with this issue. Keep this medicine in a place that isn't easy to find. For example, don't store in the medicine cabinet.
- When you don't need this medicine anymore, safely dispose of anything that is left over. Don't put it in the regular trash. Massachusetts has drop box locations for this purpose. Find out more at [www.mass.gov/ocblhs/gov\\_departments/dsh/programs/substance-abuse-prevention/prescription-drop-box-locations.html](http://www.mass.gov/ocblhs/gov_departments/dsh/programs/substance-abuse-prevention/prescription-drop-box-locations.html) or ask your local pharmacist or police station.

**Help with addiction**

Addiction can happen to anyone. Be aware of the signs of addiction. These include:

- craving the medicine
- using more than your doctor prescribed
- taking it longer than your doctor wants you to
- If any of these happen, let your doctor know right away.

To get information on resources that can help with addiction, contact the Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline at 1-800-327-5050, or online at [helpisma.org](http://helpisma.org).

**Help with pain management**

Opioids should be used for as brief a time as possible. Over-use can lead to addiction and can make the medicine less effective. Talk to your doctor about other ways you can manage your pain, including:

- Safe use of non-prescription medicines
- Topical therapies such as heat or cold
- Integrative pain therapies, including acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, and meditation. For more information, contact the CHENGO-TSUI Integrated Health Center at [www.bidmc.org/integratedcare](http://www.bidmc.org/integratedcare), or call 617-667-1455.

This material was developed by clinicians on the Opioid Care Committee at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, in conjunction with patient/family advisors. It is a trademark and distributed by the Beth Israel Deaconess Learning Center ©2017 Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. All rights reserved. 10/17 12/2017

## Next steps

- Translate fact sheet into four target languages
- Embed fact sheet into OMR for automatic printing when opioids are prescribed