

Policy for the use of opioids for the treatment of pain

The North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) believes that a fundamental component of holistic healthcare includes the appropriate evaluation and management of pain. Responsibly prescribed opioid medications may help licensees treat their patients' pain safely and effectively while improving their quality of life. It is the duty of every licensee prescribing opioid medications to be knowledgeable of both the therapeutic benefits, risks, and potential harm associated with opioid treatment. The NCBON expects every licensee prescribing opioids for the treatment of pain to provide diagnoses, treatments, and health record documentation consistent with the standard of care in North Carolina. ***The NCBON notes that a failure to provide opioid treatment consistent with the standard of care in North Carolina may subject a licensee to disciplinary action by the NCBON.***

[Section 12F.16.\(a\) of Session Law 2015-241](#) requires NC Board of Dental Examiners, NC Board of Nursing NC Board of Podiatry Examiners, NC Division of Public Health, NC Division of Medical Assistance NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services NC Division of Public Safety (Medical, dental and mental health services) to adopt the [North Carolina Medical Board policy for the use of opioids for the treatment of pain](#) by July 1, 2016. This decision was motivated in part by a 2014 report to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee. The report concluded that NC needs to strengthen its monitoring and prevention of prescription opioid abuse and specifically noted that North Carolina prescribers lack clear, authoritative standards for treating pain with prescription opioid medications.

The NCBON and other regulatory boards have previously attempted to provide guidance regarding opioid treatment of pain to its licensees through guidance documents generated and maintained by each Board. However, in order to provide its licensees with guidance that reflects the most current research and recommended practices, **the NCBON has adopted and endorsed the CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain written and maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”)**. While these guidelines do not constitute regulations or necessarily state the standard of care in North Carolina in every context, the NCBON's believes that these guidelines can provide useful information to licensees related to the appropriate considerations to be made prior to and during treatment plans involving opioids.

The CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/rr/rr6501e1.htm> In addition to its Guideline, the CDC has also provided a number of useful clinician resources related to opioid treatment of pain covering topics such as Nonopioid Treatments, Assessing Benefits and Harms, Calculating Dosage, and Tapering. These documents can be found at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/resources.html>

It is the NCBON's hope that familiarity with the concepts included in the documents above will help licensees provide safe and effective care for their North Carolina patients.

Adopted: Sep 1996; Amended: April, 2017