Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin has become aware that some providers are receiving letters from the United States Attorney offices about their opioid prescribing practices. These letters are targeted at the average amount of opioids per prescription and seek to remind providers of the CDC and Wisconsin Medical Examining Board guidelines for opioid prescribing.

Ascension Medical Group is committed to supporting our providers in providing safe and compassionate care to our patients, including the most vulnerable patients. Patients with chronic pain and those on long term opioid pain relievers are among those most vulnerable because of the debilitating nature of chronic pain, the problems that long term opioid use can cause, and the stigma associated with opioid use disorder. To meet the needs of providers caring for this diverse population, Ascension Wisconsin has created multiple resources from educational opportunities to practice improvement tools to expert consultants available to discuss practice and legal needs.

Among the educational resources, the AMG Opioid Prescribing Guidelines provide a framework for prescribing opioid pain relievers to patients with both acute and chronic pain. All providers should read and follow these guidelines. They include recommendations for obtaining a full history and physical exam as well as records review before prescribing opioid pain relievers, use of medication treatment agreements, and monitoring patients with regular office visits and periodic urine drug testing. These guidelines use the 2016 CDC Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain as their foundation and map nicely to the Wisconsin Medical Examining Board Guidelines. These clinical guidelines are supported in the Ascension Wisconsin policy, Patient Management of Chronic Controlled Substances.

Additionally, the Ascension Wisconsin Pain Council has an Opioid Guideline Toolkit with numerous clinical resources including risk assessment tools, tip sheets on interpreting urine drug testing, and patient education materials to help patients understand multimodal pain treatment options.

Ascension Medical Group has the following educational offerings for providers who wish to know more about safe prescribing, management of chronic pain and treatment of opioid use disorder:
AMG monthly webinar series on topics relating to safe opioid prescribing, chronic pain management beyond opioid pain relievers, weaning opioid pain medications, and managing opioid risk. The series continues the second Tuesday of the month at 7am. Look for e-mail one to two weeks before with that month’s topic. These lectures will be posted to MyLearning for review at another time. The first of these lectures, Safe and Responsible Treatment of Pain, is already available. The others are expected to be uploaded in the next one to two months.

AMG has made available the CDC Opioid Prescribing webinar series through MyLearning. This 11-part series covers topics ranging from safe use of opioid pain relievers to diagnosing and managing opioid use disorder. Using “CDC Opioid” to search yields the best listing of available courses.

Drug Testing in Clinical Practice: The Science and Art of Drug Monitoring. This on-demand program is presented by David Galbis-Reig, Medical Director of Addition Services, Ascension All Saints Hospital. This program is approved for 1 AMA Category 1 Credit and is approved by the WI Medical Examining Board as meeting one of the two credit hour requirements for opioid education for license renewal. The course is free for Ascension WI providers and is available in InReach. Registration tip sheet.

E-mail coming soon about the in-person portion of the ASAM Suboxone Training Course to learn how to safely manage patients with opioid use disorder. While this is only the start of the training needed to obtain a DEA waiver to prescribe suboxone, being able to treat patients with opioid use disorder is critically important to addressing the current crisis.

Ascension Wisconsin has the following content experts from the Pain Council available to help with questions or concerns.

- David Galbis-Reig, MD, Addiction Medicine, Racine
- Robert Sedlacek, MD, Family Practice, Merrill
- Oscar Wille, MD, Pain Management, Milwaukee

Other providers with content expertise in pain management or addiction medicine can reach out to the Pain Council director, Peggy Lutz, to volunteer their assistance.

Furthermore, the Office of General Counsel and Corporate Compliance are available to assist with legal and compliance questions.

- Matt Moran, Office of General Counsel
- Sarah Kleaveland Kupczak, Corporate Compliance

For those providers who have received letters, please advise your medical directors that you received one of these letters as there are additional resources that can help you in these times of increased scrutiny.