A controlled substance treatment agreement (Agreement) provides a clear set of expectations for both patients and clinicians in the management of controlled substances, which are high risk for misuse, abuse, and diversion.

Managing violations of the Agreement is a clinical challenge as there are no universal procedures to follow in every situation. Violations are best managed on an individual basis with consideration of the patient’s unique circumstances.

Key considerations with violation(s) of the Agreement:

- Presence of aberrant drug-related behaviors should prompt further evaluation for potential under-management of pain (pseudoaddiction), mental health disorder e.g., depression or anxiety, and substance use disorder.
- Any violation of the Agreement requires further evaluation to determine need for patient education, enhanced monitoring, change in treatment plan, or discontinuation of controlled substances.
- A single aberrant drug-related behavior does not imply abuse; multiple aberrant behaviors reveal a pattern suggestive of abuse.
- Aberrant drug-related behaviors vary in seriousness: “yellow flags” often refer to less serious behaviors or cautionary violations; “red flags” refer to more serious behaviors suggestive of substance use disorder and may represent violations of frank breach or imminent danger.
- A violation of the Agreement may result in discontinuation of controlled substances but should not automatically discharge a patient from the clinician’s practice.
- Illegal activity such as prescription forgery or selling prescriptions as well as any abusive, threatening behavior toward staff may result in termination of care from the clinic.
- A summary of Agreement violations is available to guide evaluation and decision-making and is available on the Opioid Guideline LibGuide.

Management of Cautionary Violations:

- Increase frequency of monitoring e.g., office visits, random urine drug screens, and pill counts.
- Utilize multi-modal, non-opioid treatment including cognitive behavioral and rehabilitation strategies.
- Consider consultation with Behavioral Health, Rehabilitation Services, or Pain Management specialists as appropriate to patient condition.
- Multiple, repeated violations should result in discontinuation of opioid treatment.

Management of Frank Break Violations:

- Discontinue controlled substances.
- Refer to Behavioral Health or Addiction Medicine for evaluation of substance use disorder as appropriate.
- Manage pain with a comprehensive non-opioid treatment plan.

For questions, contact Peggy Lutz, Service Line Director, Pain Management peggy.lutz@ascension.org or Robert Sedlacek, MD, Family Medicine, Merrill robert.sedlacek@ascension.org