MINISTRY MEDICAL GROUP – Managing Pain, Improving Lives

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist indicated for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose, including heroin overdose. Naloxone can be prescribed for the individual at risk for overdose or to a family member or person who is in a position to assist the individual at risk in the event of an overdose. Naloxone is not a controlled substance; it can be prescribed by any clinician with prescriptive authority. Any patient can purchase naloxone without a prescription directly from the pharmacy under the WI HOPE laws passed to curb opioid overdose deaths.

**Guideline Recommendations:** The CDC and the Wisconsin Medical Examining Board opioid prescribing guidelines recommend prescribing naloxone for patients at higher risk for overdose, including:

- History of overdose (a relative contraindication to chronic opioid therapy)
- Opioid doses over 50 MME per day
- History of substance use disorder
- Concurrent benzodiazepine or sedative-hypnotic use
- Clinical depression
- Evidence of increased risk identified through comprehensive risk assessment

**Additional conditions that increase risk of opioid-related harm:**

- Respiratory comorbidities e.g., sleep apnea, COPD, emphysema
- Renal dysfunction, hepatic disease, cardiac illness
- Opioid rotation due to incomplete cross-tolerance
- Opioid tolerant patient with interrupted opioid supply; abstinence lowers tolerance requiring restart of opioids at a lower dose
- Patients with difficulty accessing emergency medical services (distance, remoteness)

**Available products:**

- **Naloxone injectable with nasal atomizer** - each RX includes a prefilled syringe of naloxone 2 mg/2 mL and a nasal atomizer device. Instruct to spray 1/2 syringe into each nostril. May repeat after 2-3 minutes. Recommend dispensing #2 prefilled syringes as the medication wears off quickly and may require repeat dosing or larger doses.
  - Some assembly is required. Cost is ~$70/for 2 prefilled syringes with atomizers.
- **Naloxone nasal spray (Narcan) 4 mg** - each RX contains two 4 mg/0.1 mL intranasal devices. Instruct to spray contents of one device into one nostril. May repeat with second device into other nostril after 2-3 minutes.
  - No assembly required. Cost is ~$150/kit; pharmacy may need to order.
- **Naloxone (Evzio™) 0.4 mg auto-injector** - each RX contains two 0.4 mg/0.4 mL prefilled auto-injector devices plus 1 training injector. Instruct to inject into outer thigh, through clothing as needed; follow the voice-prompted instructions with the injector.
  - No assembly required. Cost is ~$4500/kit; not well covered by insurance.

**IMPORTANT PRESCRIBING CONSIDERATIONS:** Cost, insurance coverage, and product availability are quite variable. Contact your local pharmacist for specific prescribing questions.

**Treatment considerations:**

- Short half-life of naloxone means that duration of action of opioids will exceed that of naloxone resulting in return of respiratory depression. Advise all patients to call 911 and go to the ED after use.
- Naloxone should only be used in pregnant women with opioid dependence in life-threatening situations. Naloxone may precipitate withdrawal in the fetus, resulting in fetal distress.
Patient Education:

- Review of risk factors for opioid overdose and actions to prevent overdose
- Teach family and friends to recognize the signs of overdose, activation of emergency medical services, and how to administer naloxone
- Patient education materials are available through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services: Opioid Safety and Overdose Prevention and How to Give Naloxone: Responding to an Overdose

Additional Resources:

- Complete naloxone drug monograph is available through Lexicomp
- Prescribe to Prevent
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services - Opioids

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