Low-dose Ketamine for Pain Management in the Emergency Department

**Situation:** Low-dose ketamine (LDK), either alone or as an adjunct to opioids, can be safely administered in the Emergency Department as part of a multimodal pain management approach. LDK provides effective analgesia with minimal effects on hemodynamics and cognition with less risk of respiratory depression compared to opioid analgesics. Ascension Wisconsin lacks consistent guidelines for indications, dosing and administration. One barrier to wide-spread use of LDK across AW is the ongoing question whether registered nurses (RNs) can administer ketamine. **The answer is yes.**

**Background:**

- ACEP, ENA, and the SEMPA support use of LDK for analgesic use in the Emergency Department. A joint policy statement was approved in 2018, stating “sub-dissociative ketamine (also referred to as LDK) should commence under the same procedures and policies as other analgesic agents administered by the nursing staff in the ED setting.”
- The Wisconsin Board of Nursing did not render a definitive statement regarding LDK administration by RNs. In a personal communication with a WI Board of Nursing member (10/23/2018), it was stated “neither the Department of Safety and Professional Services (Department) nor the Board of Nursing (Board) are able to provide…the guidance you are seeking regarding practice questions…Rather, you are encouraged to review the relevant laws, professional journals, consult with colleagues, consult with professional associations or organizations…”.
- Systematic reviews and meta-analysis have concluded LDK can be used as an alternative to opioids for ED short-term pain control.
- LDK is part of a larger Ascension Health initiative to provide alternatives to opioids in the ED based on pain syndrome.
- An interdisciplinary workgroup representing ED medicine, nursing, pharmacy, pain management, and education has reviewed the relevant literature and information and conclude it is within the RN scope of practice to administer LKD for pain management.

**Next steps:**

- Ascension Wisconsin policy is pending final approval.
- A [resource guide](#) is available for quick reference.
- Research articles and additional references related to LKD have been placed on the AW Opioid Guideline Toolkit under the ALTO tab
- Pharmacy leadership is addressing administration considerations including drug library, secure infusion, and medication access in hospitals without 24-hour pharmacy access.
- Orders are being built into the EHR.
- Nursing education should commence mid-February.
- Planned go-live is mid-March.

**Ketamine workgroup:**

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