CLINICIANS WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND QIN-QIOs TO MAKE OPIOIDS SAFER

THE QIN-QIOs’ OPIOIDS SPOTLIGHT

Want to learn about the opioids epidemic? Want to learn about how you can work with Medicare’s QIN-QIOs to protect yourself and make your community safer? Read on!

What are QIN-QIOs?
Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organizations (QIN-QIOs) are a network of organizations contracted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to work with health care stakeholders and support providers in data-driven quality improvement initiatives for Medicare beneficiaries.

How can QIN-QIOs help you improve your practice?
QIOs work with providers to disseminate best practices and develop tools to promote quality improvement. In response to our nation’s opioid epidemic, QIOs are supporting clinicians in their efforts to improve opioid prescription practices and addiction treatment.

In This Spotlight
- What are QIN-QIOs?
- What can QIN-QIOs do for you as a clinician?
- The opioid epidemic
- What can you as a clinician to confront the opioid epidemic?
Burden of the Opioid Epidemic

The burden of the opioid epidemic demands great attention from clinicians and public servants alike. As people age and experience pain more frequently and severely, they are prescribed opioids at a higher rate and in larger doses. While opioids can help treat pain and improve quality of life, these larger and more frequent prescriptions put the older population at a greater risk of dependence and overdose. Addiction risk is further compounded by the fact that older Americans experience slower liver and kidney function, meaning opioids remain in their bodies for longer periods of time. Beyond the risk of dependence and overdose, opioids put patients at risk for serious secondary adverse events, such as falls.

A former nurse (see “One Patient’s Story”) notes that social attitudes towards dependency can contribute to the burden of dependency: “Society as a whole does not view drug dependency and alcoholism the same as other afflictions... We must treat people with drug dependencies with dignity.”

Accounting for 39 million Medicare Part D claims per year, opioids currently place more than 500,000 patients at serious risk for opioid-related harm: in 2016, the average Medicare Part D prescription for opioids greatly exceeded the manufacturer’s recommendation. Following an astronomical increase in opioid prescription, opioids-related emergency room visits for people over 65 doubled from 2005 to 2014, and opioid abuse rates among the elderly is projected to double in 2020 from 2004.

Opioids Fast Facts

- Six out of 1,000 Medicare beneficiaries have opioid misuse disorder.
- In 2016, more than 115 Americans overdosed on opioids each day.
- The opioid crisis cost over $504 billion per year in 2015.
- >30% of opioid overdoses involve benzodiazepines

One Patient’s Story

Carolyn, a former nurse, struggled with opioid dependency. She tried rehab, but ultimately found a solution by working with a psychiatrist to help her manage depression and anxiety, finding non-opioid strategies to manage pain, as well as through community and spiritual engagement.
Mobilizing to fight the epidemic
These alarming trends in opioid-related harm, prescribing habits, and abuse are a call to action. Numerous tools have been developed to help clinicians do good by their Medicare beneficiaries and quell the opioid epidemic: prescribers, pharmacists, and other clinicians can, when appropriate, work together to:

- Inform patients about proper opioid and medication use and disposal
- Prescribe alternatives to opioids
- Support pain treatment and management
- Screen patients for risky use patterns, abuse, and dependence
- Help patients taper their opioid doses
- Refer patients to treatment, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT)
- Learn more about the options available in your community for recovery groups and centers
- Seek out trainings and/or classes for opioid tapering and deprescribing methods
- Prescribe naloxone
- Avoid prescribing benzodiazepines or other central-nervous system depressants and opioids at the same time
- Use an opioid registry to track patients’ prescriptions and prevent doctor-shopping
- Collect data on opioid use and abuse

It is important to recognize that solutions cannot be siloed: prescribers, pharmacists, other clinicians, and community health workers can work together to build a healthcare infrastructure that promotes safe opioid-use and addiction treatment support. And of course, opioid-related harm goes beyond healthcare: engage your community to support our elderly population.
QIN-QIO Resources

QIN-QIOs provide clinicians with a variety of tools and support styles to promote safe opioid use. You can access many of the tools and learn about how to engage with QIOs online. The QIO model emphasizes peer-to-peer learning and relies on clinician input to develop tools and design learning sessions. Some of the many activities QIOs offer include:

- Facilitating peer-learning among pharmacy and clinician champions to discuss a variety of opioids-related issues
- Partnering with pharmacy schools to offer classes about adverse drug events
- Providing opioid prescription, addiction treatment, and naloxone dispensing kits
- Establishing peer coaching networks to help hospitals support beneficiaries with opioid use and mental health disorders
- Working with pharmacist to provide appropriate counseling upon opioid dispensation and promoting practices such as contacting prescribers when doses exceed recommended amounts or when prescribed alongside benzodiazepines

Moving Forward

The opioid epidemic is severe but stoppable, and you can play a role in this! The importance of engaging patients in the development of opioids prescription/addiction treatment quality improvement activities cannot be overstated. Remember to take advantage of QIO and other resources to provide your patients with quality pain-management, protect them against drug dependence, and treat addiction.

Contact your QIN-QIO

Visit our website to find your QIO and explore available resources!
https://qioprogram.org/contact