

Medical Examining Board of the State of Wisconsin  
Position Statement on Pain Management

The mission of The Medical Examining Board is to promote and protect the health and welfare of the citizens of the State of Wisconsin by fostering the provision of safe and competent medical care. The Board recognizes that such care involves the provision of appropriate and effective management of pain.

The under treatment of pain continues to be a significant public health problem in the United States. Inadequate pain control may result from physicians' lack of knowledge about pain assessment and management and/or their misunderstanding of the safety and efficacy of opioid analgesics, drugs that are essential for the management of moderate to severe pain. Physicians may also fear investigation or sanction by federal, state and local agencies which may lead to inappropriate treatment of pain.

The Board encourages physicians to view effective pain assessment and management as part of quality medical care for all patients with pain, whether it is acute or chronic. It is especially important for patients who are experiencing pain at the end of life. All physicians should be knowledgeable about effective methods of pain assessment and treatment as well as the statutory requirements for prescribing controlled substances. The medical management of pain should be guided by current knowledge and acceptable medical practice, which includes the use of both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic modalities. Pain should be assessed and treated promptly and appropriately with clear documentation.

The Board recognizes that opioid analgesics are subject to abuse by individuals who seek them for mood altering and other psychological effects rather than for legitimate medical purposes. Physicians who use these drugs in the course of treatment should be diligent and incorporate established safeguards into their practices to minimize the potential for their diversion and abuse.

The Board further recognizes that tolerance and physical dependence are normal consequences of the sustained use of opioid analgesics and are not synonymous with psychological dependence (addiction). Addiction is a primary, chronic, neurobiologic disease, with genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. It is characterized by behaviors that include: impaired control over drug use, craving, compulsive use, and continued use despite harm. Persons with a history of drug abuse have the right to appropriate pain management, even if opioids must be used. Such persons may require specialized care. Tolerance may occur but it is not an inevitable consequence of chronic opioid therapy. Physical dependence is a normal and predictable state of adaptation to a drug, and by itself, does not equate with addiction.

Physicians should not fear disciplinary action from the Board for administering controlled substances, including opioid analgesics, for a legitimate medical purpose in the usual course of professional practice. The Board will initially consider the use of controlled substances for the treatment of pain to be for a legitimate medical purpose based on accepted scientific knowledge of the treatment of pain, patient clinical presentation and sound clinical judgment. Proper written documentation, the patient's medical condition and clinical response to treatment provide strong foundations for verifying optimal patient care, if review of the patient record is necessitated at some future time.

The Medical Examining Board of the State of Wisconsin is adopting and disseminating this position statement to support and encourage safe, competent, and high quality medical care for persons with pain. By so doing, the Board clearly communicates to physicians that it:

- 1) encourages safe and effective pain management practices
- 2) recognizes that pain management, which may involve the use of opioid analgesics, is a critical part of medical practice
- 3) will not sanction physicians solely for providing opioid analgesics provided the physician administers the medication in a safe and effective manner in compliance with state and federal law.