

Abbreviated Opioid Guidelines for Patients

New Hanover Regional Medical Center (NHRMC) has developed a list of recommendations for our physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners (all of these people are considered “providers”) to follow when prescribing opioid medications. Opioids are strong pain medications used to treat moderate and severe pain, usually after a surgery or injury.

NHRMC's recommendations are based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and a new set of laws in North Carolina called the STOP Act.

Your provider will only prescribe opioid pain medications if you have already tried all other options that might help your specific kind of pain, such as other medications (over the counter and prescription), weight loss, physical therapy, etc.

When your provider is starting a new opioid for you, you will make a plan together about how long you can expect to be on the medicine, how much pain relief to expect, and what will happen if the medicine does not help your pain.

Here are the recommendations that your providers will follow:

- The Emergency Room and providers inside the hospital will not provide refills for pain medications
- Long-lasting medicines like fentanyl, methadone, and Oxycontin will not be prescribed from the Emergency Room or after a hospital stay
- You should follow-up with your primary care doctor or pain management doctor for new pain or for refills on pain medications
- If you have pain after your surgery, schedule a follow-up appointment with your surgeon
- The Emergency Room will not refill your pain medications if they are lost, stolen, or damaged
- You will not receive more than 3-5 days of pain medicines for a new, short-term pain – this is the law
- Your provider will check to see if pain medications are helping both your pain and allowing you to be more active
- Pain medications should be used with caution in patients with mental health disorders, sleep apnea, lung problems, heart failure, the elderly, or in patients with kidney and liver problems.
- Patients who are taking pain medications along with benzodiazepines (Ativan, Xanax, Klonopin, Valium) are at a higher risk of side effects. The dose of these medications may be stopped or lowered to prevent this.
- If you are getting long-term pain medications, you will likely be asked to sign a controlled substance agreement.
- The government has set levels for doses of pain medicines. Giving higher doses than recommended puts the patient at risk for dangerous side effects. Your provider may use other medications to help treat your pain. Your provider may lower your doses of pain medicines to a safer level.