



Opioid Medicine Reviews: some information

Why it's important to review people who take regular opioid medicines for pain

Clinical guidelines recommend that patients taking opioids regularly have a face-to-face review at least every 6 months.

We know from our research with people who live with pain benefit from regular reviews of their pain medicines.

Here is what one person told us:

“Knowing what I know now, about some pain medication! I feel it is imperative to have regular reviews... If I had known what I do now, I would have looked for alternative tools to manage my chronic pain. I lost so many years of my life through prescription opioids”

Discussion forum participant, male, 59 years old, lived with pain for 27 years

What are opioid medicines taken for?

Opioids can be effective if taken for short-term pain, but they don't seem to help most people with long-term pain (also called persistent or chronic pain).

This is a problem because many people in the UK take opioids for long-term pain.

Opioids may seem to help a little at first, but they often become less effective over time as the body gets used to them. This is called building up tolerance.

Opioids are a group of medicines used for pain.



Examples of opioid medicines are Morphine, Codeine, Dihydrocodeine, Tramadol, Oxycodone and Tapentadol,



Buprenorphine and Fentanyl are examples of opioids that come in patches



Sometimes opioids are mixed with paracetamol, for example in Co-codamol and Co-dydramol.

What's the problem with taking opioid medicines long-term?

Opioids can cause a number of unwanted effects that interfere with quality of life and wellbeing. It can be difficult to tell which symptoms are related to the underlying pain condition and which are caused or made worse by opioids.

Scientists have also discovered that people taking long-term opioids are more likely to develop other problems. They're more likely to fall, have lower sex drive, be more prone to infections, and have poorer quality sleep.

How can a clinical pharmacist help you?

At your pain review, your pharmacist will...

- Decide with you whether the opioids you take are working for you,
- make sure they aren't doing more harm than good,
- look at what else may be helpful to help you live well with long-term pain.

"I use the clinical pharmacists at the GP surgery. He's great and responds straight away sharing knowledge. He has also been supportive when I managed to reduce my use of opiates...understanding.... I still use daily but lower doses."

Discussion forum participant, lived with pain for over 40 years

"I've found them[the clinical pharmacist] very helpful. I think it's a good idea to talk to them ... I've found advice and sorting medication out very easy with a clinical pharmacist"

Discussion forum participant

For more information and to watch a short animation explaining which medicines are opioids and which are not

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