**Enhancing Opioid Medication System Safety: The Alberta Experience**

**Project Purpose:**
- To establish a baseline of opioid management practices in Alberta acute care facilities.
- To identify common issues relating to opioid storage and management that could potentially lead to design of collaborative projects for medication system enhancements.
- To gain support and interest for collaborative projects among the health regions in Alberta.

**Timeline:**

- **June 2004:** Hydromorphone error in 4 weeks in a patient death
- **Alberta Medication Safety Collaborative (AMSC) formed**
- ** Priority projects for collaboration included “Develop and implement best practices for the safe handling of narcotics in Alberta acute care facilities”**
- ** June 2005:** ISMP Canada’s “Survey of Opioid (Narcotic) Management in Hospitals” customized for use in Alberta
- **January 2006:** Summary recommendations, response binder presented to AMSC
- **February 2006 – present:** Opioid Checklist created to assess progress
- **June - July 2007:** Progress documented with reports and Checklist (Baseline)

**Opioid System Changes Reported by Regional Health Authorities (5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opioid System Changes</th>
<th>Number of Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient assessment &amp; monitoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callout &amp; communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent double check</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage &amp; accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA &amp; epidural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcomes:**
- No single issue was identified that the group wanted to address through a collaborative province-wide project.
- All regional departments of pharmacy set priorities for local action and made some system changes. Initial priorities for most regions were improving safety of PCA and epidural narcotics, as well as narcotic storage in patient care areas, including differentiation of look-alike/sound-alike products.
- The Opioid Checklist will be a useful tool to help assess ongoing progress with opioid medication system improvements.
- The AMSC has evolved into an important networking and planning group for leaders of hospital pharmacy departments in Alberta.

**Lessons Learned:**
- Networks are an important means of creating an impetus for change and sustain the momentum for ongoing medication system improvements.
- Opioid medication system improvement is an ongoing process that can be aided with tools such as the ISMP Canada Survey and the Opioid Checklist.