

Challenging Conversations Around Opioids for Acute Pain

Examples of Open Questions

- “What do you think about receiving a smaller quantity in the beginning?”
- “Tell me about your expectations around pain management?”
- “What other pain medications did the doctor discuss with you?”

Examples of Reflective Statements

- “It sounds like you are in a lot of pain”
- “You seem upset by this.....”
- “You’re concerned that this quantity may not be enough....”

Other Statements a Patient Might Make

1. **Patient Question / Comment:** *“But why are you suggesting something different to my Doctor?”*

Sample Response for curious patient: *“That’s a great question. We’re all working together to ensure your medications are safe. We now know that most people don’t use all their opioid tablets which can be dangerous if left over at home. We’re giving you the option of taking home a smaller amount initially to prevent this from happening. The quantity your doctor prescribed will still be available.”*

2. **Patient Question / Comment:** *“But why are you suggesting something different to my Doctor?”*

Sample Response for angry patient: *“I’m sorry if I’ve upset you. Can I tell you how we’re all working together to keep you safe?”*

3. **Patient Question / Comment:** *“You’re suggesting medications that I have to pay for when the opioids are covered by my insurance?”*

Sample Response: *“It’s unfortunate that they aren’t covered. You should only need a small quantity and you can purchase the generic which is cheaper. They do have less side effects and are more suitable for your pain. What do you think?”*

4. **Patient Question / Comment:** *"You're telling me that I'll have to pay another dispensing fee if I need another part-fill?"*

Sample Response: *"Yes, that is a valid consideration for your decision. If it helps, most people do not need another part-fill and you will be less likely to have left over tablets at home. What do you think?"*

Note: If an extra dispensing fee is a barrier to accessing another part-fill then you may have to reconsider the quantity. You can present the facts as illustrated in the sample response above and share the decision with the patient. The patient may decline the initial part-fill, but you can document that you offered it.

5. **Patient Question / Comment:** *"What if you don't give me enough and I'm left in pain?"*

Sample Response: *"The remainder of the prescription will be available for you if needed. If you find your pain is still severe when you are running low, just contact us and we can discuss your pain again. Remember, we know that most people do not end up needing more."*

6. **Patient Question / Comment:** *"You're trying to deny me the pain medications that I've been prescribed? Do you think I won't use them properly?"*

Sample Response: *"This recommendation was not meant to upset you. We are discussing the safety of opioids with everyone and making suggestions to help reduce the risks associated with having leftover opioids at home. Would you like to know more?"*

7. **Patient Question / Comment:** *"How can medicines that you can buy over the counter be as good as the opioid tablets my doctor has prescribed?"*

Sample Response: *"Research has shown that medicines like ibuprofen, and / or acetaminophen can be as effective opioids for certain types of pain, for example dental pain and pain from aches and strains. They also have less side effects like drowsiness and constipation."*

Note: Not every recommendation will be accepted but remember to document any recommendation you do make.