

This handout explains the Vancouver Island Health Authority's (VIHA) Nanaimo Emergency Department policy on prescribing opiates for chronic pain.

- **Opiates** – types of pain medication used to treat medium to severe pain. Examples include codeine, hydromorphone, morphine and oxycodone [Percocet].
- **Chronic pain** – pain that lasts longer than the expected period of healing.
- **Acute pain** – pain that comes on quickly, but lasts a shorter period of time.

Why is this policy needed?

This policy was developed to help achieve the appropriate use, and avoid misuse of opiate medications. It was developed based on guidelines from the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons, American College of Emergency Physicians, and the Canadian Guidelines for Safe and Effective Use of Opiates.

What is the policy?

In general, VIHA's Nanaimo Emergency Department does not provide prescriptions or provide opiates to be used outside of the Emergency Department. If you have a regular local prescriber or have a prior prescription that cannot be verified, you will not be provided with a renewal prescription.

You and your family or prescribing doctor

Doctors must consider the following when prescribing opiates for non-cancer chronic pain:

- Opiate medications should only be prescribed by one doctor.
- Prescriptions should be based on a thorough first assessment by your family or prescribing doctor. Emergency Departments are not able to do this type of assessment.

- Regular follow-up is very important to make sure the opiates are helping. This is best done with your regular care provider.

You share responsibility for your treatment plan with your family doctor or specialist and therefore you should:

- Make an appointment well before you run out of a medication or if you are using more medication for any reason at all.
- Make sure you have enough medication if either you or your doctor goes on holiday.
- Keep your medications safe to ensure they are not lost or stolen.
- Talk with your doctor about what to do if your pain gets worse for any reason.

The emergency department is not responsible for the above issues and will not refill prescriptions for the above reasons.

Who can help me in the community?

Mental Health and Addictions Access Services Brookes Landing 203- 2000 Island Highway Tel: 250-739-5710	Drop-in Monday to Friday 10:00 am -6:15 pm
Nanaimo Narcotics Anonymous Tel: 1.888.265.7333 Web: http://www.bcrna.ca	
For non-emergency health information and services: HealthLinkBC –Health information you can trust 24/7 Tel: 8.1.1 from anywhere in BC. Tel: 7.1.1for deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY) Web: www.HealthLinkBC.ca	

The information in this handout is intended only for the person it was given to by the health care team. It does not replace the advice or directions given to you by your doctor.