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BUPRENORPHINE AND METHADONE POWDERS

RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION IN PA PROGRAM

Background

Buprenorphine and methadone powders are opioid drugs that are used for pain control and opioid dependence. The intent of the criteria is to provide coverage consistent with product labeling, FDA guidance, standards of medical practice, evidence-based drug information, and/or published guidelines. These powders are included because of the risks of addiction, abuse, and misuse with opioids, even at recommended doses, and because of the greater risks of overdose and death (1-8).

Maximum daily limit of any combination of opioid medications with a PA is 200 MME/day.

Regulatory Status

FDA-approved indications: (1-2)

1. Buprenorphine and methadone powders are opioid agonists indicated for the relief of moderate to severe acute and chronic pain where an opioid is appropriate.

2. Buprenorphine and methadone powders are indicated for detoxification or maintenance treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs), in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services.

Buprenorphine and methadone powders have boxed warnings for the following (1-2):

- Respiratory depression is the chief hazard of opioid agonists, which if not immediately recognized and treated, may lead to respiratory arrest and death. Risk is increased in patients receiving concurrent CNS depressants (including alcohol), patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, orthostatic hypotension, increased intracranial pressure, biliary tract diseases, and seizure disorders. To reduce the risk of respiratory depression, proper dosing, titration, and monitoring are essential.

- All patients treated with opioids require careful monitoring for signs of abuse and addiction, since use of opioid analgesic products carries the risk of addiction even under appropriate medical use.

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- Accidental ingestion of extended-release opioids, especially in children, can result in fatal opioid overdose.

- Prolonged use of opioid agonists during pregnancy can result in neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, which may be life-threatening.

- Concomitant use of opioids with benzodiazepines or other central nervous system (CNS) depressants, including alcohol, may result in profound sedation, respiratory depression, coma, and death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain recommends that when opioids are started, clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dosage. Clinicians should use caution when prescribing opioids at any dosage, should carefully reassess evidence of individual benefits and risks when increasing dosage to ≥50 morphine milligram equivalents (MME)/day, and should avoid increasing dosage to ≥90 MME/day or carefully justify a decision to titrate dosage to ≥90 MME/day. The extended-release opioid drug initial quantity limits are set to encompass the usual/starting dosage and frequency range recommendations in labeling without exceeding 90 MME per day (3-4).

CDC guidelines find that concurrent use of benzodiazepines and opioids might put patients at greater risk for potentially fatal overdose. Three studies of fatal overdose deaths found evidence of concurrent benzodiazepine use in 31%–61% of decedents (3-4). The FDA also states that benzodiazepines “are also commonly abused and misused, often together with opioid pain relievers and other medicines” (8).

The CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain states that when starting opioid therapy for chronic pain, clinicians should prescribe immediate-release opioids instead of extended-release/long-acting opioids. Clinicians should evaluate benefits and harms with patients within 1 to 4 weeks of starting opioid therapy for chronic pain or of dose escalation. Clinicians should evaluate benefits and harms of continued therapy with patients every 3 months or more frequently. If benefits do not outweigh harms of continued opioid therapy, clinicians should optimize other therapies and work with patients to taper opioids to lower dosages or to taper and

discontinue opioids (3-4).

The American Pain Society Opioid Treatment Guidelines state that a reasonable definition for high dose opioid therapy is >200 mg daily of oral morphine (or equivalent). The Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement Chronic Pain Guideline states that among patients receiving opioids for non-malignant pain, the daily dose is strongly associated with opioid-related mortality. An average dose of 200 mg or more morphine (or equivalent) was associated with a nearly nine-fold increase in the risk of overdose relative to low doses (<20 mg of morphine or equivalent) (3-8).

The FDA has determined that a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) is necessary for all opioid analgesics intended for outpatient use to ensure that the benefits of these drugs continue to outweigh the risks. The Opioid Analgesic REMS is a strategy to reduce the risk of abuse, misuse, addiction, overdose, and deaths due to prescription opioid analgesics. Prescribers should counsel patients and caregivers about the use of naloxone for opioid overdose and consider prescribing naloxone if clinically indicated (7).

Summary

Buprenorphine and methadone powders are opioid agonists indicated for the relief of moderate to severe acute and chronic pain where an opioid is appropriate. Buprenorphine and methadone powders are also indicated for detoxification or maintenance treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs), in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services. These powders should only be prescribed by healthcare professionals who are knowledgeable in the use of Schedule II opioids for pain or addiction therapy (1-8). Prior authorization is required to ensure the safe, clinically appropriate, and cost-effective use of buprenorphine and methadone powders while maintaining optimal therapeutic outcomes.

References

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BUPRENORPHINE AND METHADONE POWDERS

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