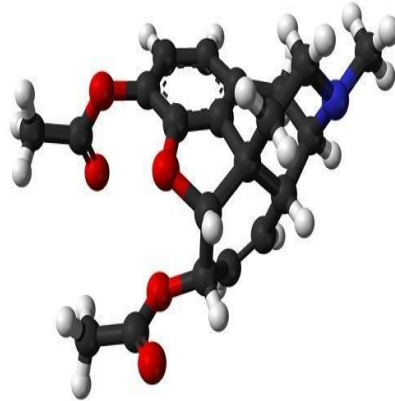




## Patient Confusion about Opioid Addiction in the ED



Emergency department (ED) patients have misperceptions about opioid dependence and want more information about their pain management options, according to researchers from Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Patients seen in the ED for acute pain, the researchers note, expressed a desire for better communication from physicians about their pain management options, along with discussion of the risks of opioid dependence.

“There’s clearly a significant need for emergency departments to improve education around the risks of opioid misuse,” says senior author Zachary F. Meisel, MD, MPH, MS, assistant professor and attending physician in the department of Emergency Medicine. The findings are published online in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*.

Data from this study are now being used by the research team to develop short video narratives of patient stories related to pain in the ED, which will then be tested as an intervention to improve patient understanding of their pain management options and the risks associated with opioid misuse.

The study used semi-structured open-ended telephone interviews with 23 patients (mostly women, ages 18 to 65) discharged from the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania after being seen in the ED during a four-month period in 2014, for pain related to broken bones in the arms or legs, musculoskeletal back injury or kidney stones.

The main themes of the interviews included opioid dependence and addiction, and patient-provider communication about pain management. The themes patients revealed around opioid dependence included:

1. fear of developing dependence or addiction;
2. worries about following prescribed dosing preventing the possibility of addiction;
3. relying on media and other individuals as a source of information about opioids; and
4. awareness of physicians’ need to balance patients’ pain management needs and safe opioid prescribing guidelines.

According to Dr. Meisel, “It was interesting to find that patients believe that taking an opioid as prescribed prevents the possibility of addiction, but also that patients are learning about opioids from television and from friends and acquaintances — not healthcare providers.”

In addition, there were several themes that emerged around patient-provider communication about pain management. Patients often reported that they desired engagement in decisions about the treatment plan,

better communication about the cause of their pain, consideration of how the pain is affecting their life, and more empathy from providers. Notably, patients felt that fragmentation in communication between providers was detrimental to their treatment.

“Patients realise that emergency departments are busy places, but that doesn’t reduce their desire to have meaningful interactions with their care providers,” Dr. Meisel notes. “Patients want to be given information in a straight-forward way and then listened to, so that they leave feeling like they know what was causing their pain, what their pain management options were, and that their treatment preferences were heard.”

Source: [Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania](#)

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