Dear Patient,

Healthcare providers and staff at Ascension Medical Group are committed to providing a positive health care experience for our patients. We are writing to inform you of important changes for persons who take opioid pain medications. While opioids can be effective when used for a short amount of time, several new research studies show opioids do not help most individuals when taken on a long-term basis. In fact, the risk of harm is greater for patients who take opioids for longer periods of time. We have learned that much of the way pain has been treated in the past is no longer considered safe or reasonable.

Opioid pain medications are considered high-risk medications that are regulated by the State and Federal government. To decrease the danger of opioid addiction and overdose, almost every state has passed laws that require healthcare providers to follow several steps when prescribing opioid pain medications. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released guidelines in 2016 recommending additional precautions and changes in how pain medications are used. Ascension Medical Group is asking all our providers to follow these guidelines.

We recognize that pain often has a negative impact on a person's health and quality of life and Ascension Medical Group's new protocol will help ensure that we are treating pain in a safe and effective way.

We understand that patients who suffer from chronic pain often face very complicated situations. Patients and physicians must work together to find a treatment plan that successfully reduces pain, while minimizing high-risk treatments. In cases where a patient and physician determine that the use of an opioid medication provides more benefit than risk, providers must follow several steps, including:

* Reviewing medical records from previous treating providers,
* Encouraging patients to adopt healthy behaviors that might improve their condition (good nutrition, physical activity and stress management should be an important part of every treatment plan),
* Scheduling appointments at least every three months to assess and address the patient’s pain issue,
* Continuously evaluating patients for other treatment options that may improve their condition,
* Assessing a patient’s mood and treating it if needed (to improve response to pain treatment),
* Screening patients with urine drug tests and checking state drug databases,
* Avoiding prescribing medications and combinations of medications known to be dangerous or addictive,
* Having all patients sign a treatment agreement,
* Weaning patients down or off pain medications if patients do not improve ability to function; if patients are unable or unwilling to follow through with other aspects of the treatment plan; or if opioid doses are higher than what is recommended,
* Referring patients to a specialist if pain is not well controlled,
* Referring patients for chemical dependency evaluation if there is a concern for a substance use problem or if the patient is unable or unwilling to tolerate a planned opioid wean,

As part of the healthcare team, we believe that these standards will keep our patients safe, create a better quality of life for our patients and make our communities safer. We will continue to work with providers and our staff to ensure these protocols are working to help our patients. If you have specific questions regarding these new guidelines or how it may affect your treatment, please discuss them with your provider.

Sincerely,

The Ascension Staff and Leadership

