

Dear North Carolina Medical Board Licensee,

The state of North Carolina is in the midst of a public health crisis related to deaths from prescription opioid overdose. It is generally recognized that most opioid medications implicated in unintentional overdose deaths were originally prescribed by a licensed medical professional. In an effort to address this crisis, the North Carolina General Assembly amended state law to authorize the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to release certain opioid prescribing information to the North Carolina Medical Board (NCMB) and other health regulatory boards.\*

NCMB began receiving prescribing information in late 2015 and is now in the process of implementing a new investigative program based on DHHS data. We are writing to provide you with general information on this initiative and how it might impact you.

The Board will contact prescribers who meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. The prescriber falls within the top one percent of those prescribing 100 milligrams of morphine equivalents (MME) per patient per day.
2. The prescriber falls within the top one percent of those prescribing 100 MMEs per patient per day in combination with any benzodiazepine and is within the top one percent of all controlled substance prescribers by volume.
3. The prescriber has had two or more patient deaths in the preceding twelve months due to opioid poisoning. (The initial review period for which data was received looked at patient deaths between July 2014 and June 2015. The first batch of investigations opened cover patient deaths in this date range.)

The Board will determine the appropriateness of prescribing through standard methods, including review of patient records, independent expert medical reviews and written responses from the prescriber. Conclusions reached about appropriateness of care will be based on compliance with current standards of care, not quantity/dosages of medication prescribed or patient outcomes. We are working to add resources to our website regarding the Board's process for handling the prescribing information from DHHS. To review current standards of care related to the use of opioids in pain management and other information, see the [responsible opioid prescribing](#) section of our website.

We recognize that prescribers identified through the criteria stated above may be practicing and prescribing in accordance with accepted standards of care. However, given the known risks of opioids and the rising incidence of unintentional overdose deaths, the Board has an obligation to verify the appropriateness of care and prescribing. We appreciate your cooperation as NCMB moves forward with this important new program.

Thank you,



Pascal O. Udekwu  
President, North Carolina Medical Board

\*See, [N.C. Gen. Stat. § 90-113.74](#) and related administrative rule, [21 NCAC 32Y .0101](#)