

June 29, 2016

Dear North Carolina Medical Board Licensee,

In April, I wrote to all licensees about a new effort by the Board to address potentially unsafe opioid prescribing in the state. The Safe Opioid Prescribing Initiative attempts to reduce patient harm from misuse and abuse of prescription opioids by identifying and, where necessary, intervening to prevent excessive and/or inappropriate prescribing.

NCMB has received feedback from licensees and patients that some prescribers have responded to this new initiative by arbitrarily reducing patient dosages, ceasing prescribing or discharging patients in an attempt to avoid Board scrutiny. Some patients who have contacted the Board have indicated they were told by their provider that NCMB has imposed a limit on how much medication may be prescribed.

The type and amount of medication prescribed should be determined by the prescriber, based on generally accepted standards of care and objective clinical information for each individual patient. The Board has not established any specific limits on opioid prescribing.

The Safe Opioid Prescribing Initiative is focused on prescribers managing large numbers of patients at doses at or above 100 morphine milligram equivalents (MMEs) per patient, per day, as required by rule (21 North Carolina Administrative Code 32M .0117). This is no doubt the source of the erroneous notion that NCMB has established a prescribing limit. However, [North Carolina General Statute § 90-113.74\(b2\)](#) states that selection criteria for investigations "shall not establish the standard of care for prescribing." The law also states that the Board may not discipline a licensee solely because he or she prescribes at or above the level specified in the investigative selection criteria.

Physicians and others who treat chronic pain are encouraged to review current standards of care by reading NCMB's position statement on use of opiates for the treatment of pain and other resources. Visit NCMB's opioid prescribing page online: www.ncmedboard.org/safeopioids

Thank you,



Pascal O. Udekwu
President, North Carolina Medical Board