

Opioid Use Disorder

Defining and Identifying Signs of OUD in Patients

Introduction:

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) is a chronic disorder characterized by a problematic pattern of opioid use leading to complications or distress, with **at least two symptoms** of OUD (outlined below) occurring **within a 12-month period**:

OUD Symptoms:

- Taking opioids in larger amounts or over a longer period than intended.
- Inability to reduce or stop opioid use.
- Spending a lot of time obtaining/ using opioids or recovering from their effects.
- Persistent cravings, desire, or urge to use opioids
- Problems fulfilling obligations at work, school, or home.
- Continued opioid use despite recurring social or interpersonal problems.
- Avoiding or reducing other activities due to opioid use.
- Using opioids in dangerous situations (i.e., driving while under the influence of opioids).
- Continued opioid use despite ongoing physical or psychological problem likely to be caused or worsened by opioids.
- Diminished hyperalgesia or opioid tolerance (i.e., need for increased amounts, diminished effect upon use of the same amount)*
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms and/or taking opioids to relieve/avoid withdrawal symptoms.*

**Not considered symptoms of OUD in patients being prescribed opioids for the treatment of chronic pain*

Risk Factors for OUD:

- History of trauma*
- Adverse childhood events (abuse, neglect)*
- History of mental illness*
- Family history of substance use disorder(s)
- Extended use (>3 months)
- History of other substance use disorder(s)

****Increase associated risk by as much as 50%***

Signs of OUD in Provider-Facing Behavior:

- Resistance to decreasing dose or tapering conversations
- Requests for early refills
- Requests for higher doses
- Missed compliance appointments for urine drug screens or pill counts
- Unexpected findings in urine drug screen or pill count results

Conversations with patients about their OUD diagnosis may be uncomfortable and should be handled compassionately. Achieving recovery from OUD may be difficult but is possible with evidence-based treatment. Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) are widely considered the most effective treatment for OUD, but counselling and behavioral therapies can also support OUD patients in achieving recovery.

References

1. https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/DEA-OPCK_FactSheet-07262022.pdf
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/index.html>