

# Driving Down Opioid Prescribing

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## Introduction

Opioid use in the United States has reached epidemic proportions. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, in 2016 11.5 million people misused prescription opioids, and 116 people died every day from opioid-related drug overdoses. Community awareness of the danger of opioid use is increasing, but it remains the responsibility of health care practitioners to ensure safety of their patients while providing guidance in managing pain. While awareness is an important component to reducing opioid use, this strategy is dependent on a great number of stakeholders (prescribers and patients alike) becoming aware of the dangers and changing behavior.

## Aim

Reduce total number of opioid prescriptions and average quantity prescribed for new start opioid prescriptions.

## Methods

We believed one way to heighten awareness of the risks of opioid use, as well as to make it easy for our prescribers to do the right thing, was to change the default quantity of pills in our electronic medical record for all opioid medications to 10. This number was selected because it was lower than the average quantity previously prescribed, and generally would result in a total morphine milligram equivalent (MME) that was more in line with clinical practice guidelines such as those recommended by the CDC.

## Actions Taken

In November 2016, the default quantity for opioid medications in our electronic medical record was changed systemwide to 10 pills. Previously, the default typically was 30 pills or no default was set.

While prescribers have the ability to change the quantity as necessary, setting the default to a lower quantity was a way to make the right thing to do the easy thing to do.

## Results

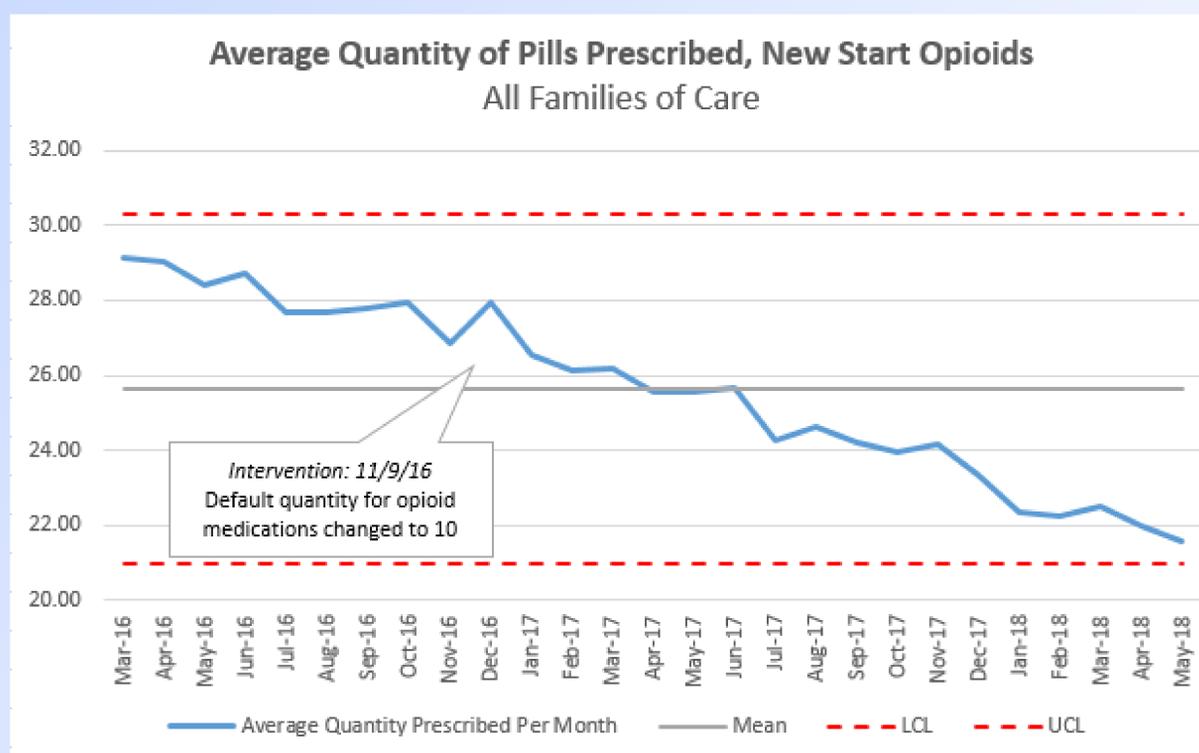


Figure 1 (upper right). Change in prescribing patterns of most commonly prescribed quantity for opioid prescriptions for those patients with no previous opioid script in the prior 6 months, March 2016-May 2018

Figure 2 (above). Change in prescribing patterns of most commonly prescribed quantity for opioid prescriptions for those patients with no previous opioid script in the prior 6 months, March 2016-May 2018

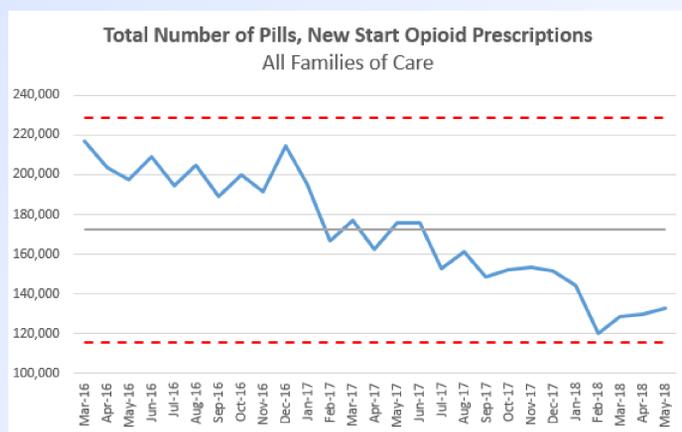


Figure 3 (right). Reduction in total opioid prescriptions to patients with no previous opioid script in the prior 6 months, March 2016-May 2018.

## Conclusion

- Nearly 5,000 fewer patients per month are receiving an opioid prescription today each month than was the case 2 years ago (of those, 700 are patients who would otherwise have been receiving a new prescription).
- Patients are less likely to get an opioid prescription if not needed, and if they do receive opioids, they are more likely to get an appropriate minimal amount to address acute pain and limit the risk of becoming addicted.

## References

CDC guidelines: [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines\\_factsheet-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines_factsheet-a.pdf)