



## IN THE KNOW

### An alternative for managing chronic pain

Helping patients who suffer with chronic pain by prescribing drugs like Oxycontin or Lortab can be expensive, even in their generic form. As a result of the number of Project Access patients with chronic pain, narcotics now rank first in expenditures under the prescription assistance budget.

There is a less expensive alternative to the standard medications, one with few side effects and a lower abuse level — methadone.

Chronic pain is not well managed with short-acting opiate analgesics, according to Timothy Scanlan, MD, chair of the Medical Society of Sedgwick County's Public Health Commission and recognized addiction specialist. By virtue of its half-life, methadone is a long-acting opiate well suited for treating patients with chronic pain.

Studies have documented methadone's effectiveness, and suggest that it may have a better side effect profile than other opiates. It is also far less costly than other long-acting analgesics. A typical month's supply of 10mg generic Methadone costs \$25 compared to \$48 for 10mg Lortab.

Any physician with the normal DEA registration for all scheduled drugs can prescribe methadone.

Though widely known as a treatment for opiate dependence, methadone's efficacy as an analgesic and its pharmacologic and cost profile make it a reasonable choice for chronic pain, or as an alternative when inadequate relief, side effects or costs become an issue.

# ACCESS INFORMATION

## Program commits to "generic only" Rx

Prescription assistance for patients enrolled in Project

Access has been an integral part of the program since it began in 1999. An annual financial commitment from the City of Wichita and Sedgwick

County, totaling \$492,000, ensures that each Project Access patient can receive up to \$1,000 in prescription assistance for a one-year period.

"Diagnosing a medical problem without providing the medicine to treat the condition just doesn't make sense for uninsured patients served through Project Access," said Anne Nelson, chief operations officer for Project Access/Central Plains Regional Health Care Foundation. "The funds provided by the city and county have made a tremendous difference in the lives of many patients."

This program benefit, however, has become increasingly expensive to maintain. A 2005 study of expenditures showed that name-brand drugs accounted for 59% of funds spent on prescriptions. The top three categories of drugs prescribed were narcotic pain medications, antidepressants and proton pump inhibitors. The 2006 budget for prescriptions is likely to be depleted before the end of the year.

As a result, the Central Plains board of directors approved a generic-only policy for the prescriptions, effective July 1, 2006.

"To preserve the prescription funds, the board accepted the recommendation of a committee, comprised of practicing physicians

and a pharmacist, to pay only for generic medications, with a small number of exceptions," Christopher Moeller, MD, president of the Central Plains Foundation, wrote in a recent letter to physicians caring for Project Access patients.

Name brand exceptions to the generic-only policy include:

- Insulin, syringes, needles, test strips, lancets, Actos, Avandia and Avandamet for diabetic patients.
- Steroid inhalers for asthma patients.

Project Access has added an appeal process to the generic-only medication policy that allows physicians to ask for a patient to receive name-brand drugs.

All patients have been informed of the new policy. Physicians needing more information should call Project Access at 688-0600.

## Care management staff hard at work

It takes good people to make any organization effective and successful. With this principle in mind, Anne Nelson, chief operations officer, and Paul Meals, program manager of the new Enhanced Care Management (ECM) of Sedgwick County, have assembled a team of professionals to work with patients enrolled in this new program developed collaboratively by the Kansas Health Policy Authority, Central Plains Regional Health Care Foundation, and the

*continued on back page*



## Enhanced Care Management

continued from front page

Medical Society of Sedgwick County. ECM works with patients and their providers to incorporate evidence-based standards of care for certain chronic conditions, such as diabetes, asthma and congestive heart failure.

"We've hired a great team with excellent professional experience," said Meals. Staff members include:

- Shelley Anderson – Social Service Care Manager
- Ora Benson – Nurse Care Manager
- Sheila Blackmon – Nurse Care Manager
- Dee Collins – Nurse Care Manager
- Tiffany Frahm – Social Service Care Manager
- Melanie James – Administrative Assistant
- Theresa Renner – Nurse Care Manager

In addition, Adrian Walling, MD, is now ECM's contracted medical director.

As of July 10, ECM has enrolled 80 patients. ECM services have been offered to over 500 Medicaid patients identified by the state's Health Policy Authority. New procedures allow HealthConnect primary care case management providers to refer patients for ECM services. Efforts are underway to create a process for the local



ECM program staff include (seated, from left to right) Shelley Anderson, Ora Benson, Paul Meals, Sheila Blackmon, and Tiffany Frahm and (standing, from left to right) Dee Collins, Melanie James, Dr. Adrian Walling and Theresa Renner.

residency programs and safety net clinics to also refer patients.

Collecting and analyzing patient data has been a high priority for ECM. Preliminary data shows:

- Nearly half of ECM's enrolled patients – 45% – have been diagnosed with three or more common chronic conditions.
- Approximately 70% of patients either use tobacco or live in a home with tobacco use.
- Most are 30–55 years old.

ECM will use survey instruments to evaluate how best to work with patients and to measure changes in their health over time.

"Central Plains has worked hard to get this project implemented, and demonstrates a priority to improving health outcomes," said Susan Wood, RN, BSN, ECM program manager for the Kansas Health Policy Authority.

## NUMBERS COUNT

Since September 1, 1999...

**6,764 patients** have enrolled in Project Access, and **723 patients** are active as of July 10.

**550 physicians** participate in Project Access and **50 physicians** volunteer in six community clinics for a total participation rate of **70%** of MSSC practicing physicians.

**\$15,200,299** in care has been donated by physicians submitting HCFA billing reports.

**\$37,624,500** in care has been donated by seven area hospitals submitting UB92s.

**\$2,843,177** in prescriptions have been purchased (**134,602 prescription** claims filed) with funds provided by the Sedgwick County Commission and the Wichita City Council and filled at no charge by **80 participating pharmacies**.

In addition, pharmacy efforts by Project Access leveraged over **\$1,403,396** in donated medications for the program's patients.

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*"I am so thankful that you have a program such as this to help the ones in need. Because of your services and my doctor being in the program, he is now my health provider."* 2005 Project Access patient

