Pain assessment and management standards for ambulatory care

Effective Jan. 1, 2019, new and revised pain assessment and management standards will be applicable to all Joint Commission-accredited ambulatory care, critical access hospitals, and office-based surgery organizations. The Joint Commission published new and revised pain assessment and management requirements in January 2018 for the Hospital Accreditation program (see July 2017 issue of Perspectives). This project is a continuation of this initiative.

Engagement with stakeholders, customers, and experts

In addition to an extensive literature review and public field review, The Joint Commission sought expert guidance through the following:

- **Technical advisory panel (TAP)** included practicing clinicians from health care and academic organizations, professional associations, the payor and health technology sectors.
- **Primary care panel** included experts in chronic non-cancer pain management in the primary care setting, including members of leading health care organizations with ongoing safe prescribing and provider education initiatives.
- **Standards review panel (SRP)** consisted of representatives from organizations or professional associations who provided a “boots on the ground” point of view and insights into the practical application of the proposed standards.

The prepublication version of the pain assessment and management standards, will be available online until the end of 2018. After Jan. 1, 2019, access the standards in the E-dition or standards manual.

**Leadership**

*LD.04.03.13: Pain assessment and pain management, including safe opioid prescribing, is identified as an organizational priority.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>LD.04.03.13 EP 1: The organization has a leader or leadership team that is responsible for pain management and opioid prescribing and developing and monitoring performance improvement activities. (See also PI.02.01.01, EP 19)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Gaps in the evidence on optimal pain management, combined with a substantial rise in opioid use and associated harms over the past two decades, are of great concern for health care organizations and the public. Solutions to these safety and quality problems require the coordination of administrative and physician leadership to promote quality initiatives and allocate resources for safe pain management.</td>
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</table>

**Requirement**

LD.04.03.13, EP 3: The organization provides staff and licensed independent practitioners with educational resources to improve pain assessment, pain management, and the safe use of opioid medications based on the identified needs of its patient population.

**Rationale**

Provider competence is stressed in clinical practice guidelines, regulations, and by experts in the field. Providers are expected to be knowledgeable about multiple modalities of pain treatment, early identification and prevention of harms of opioid therapy, and management of patients with complex needs. However, providers report insufficient training in pain management and opioid prescribing. The organization can increase provider competence in pain management by providing access to effective education resources.

**Reference**


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**Requirement**

LD.04.03.13, EP 4: The organization provides information to staff and licensed independent practitioners on available services for consultation and referral of patients with complex pain management needs.

**Rationale**

Many patients in hospital and ambulatory settings have complex pain management needs and require multidisciplinary care. Access to specialists through consultation, referral, or use of in-house experts reflects best practice. For example, consultation or referral to a pain specialist is advised when it is necessary to develop a perioperative pain management plan for the patient with opioid tolerance or a history of substance abuse. Cost, lack of transportation, and low availability of services may hinder the use of nonpharmacologic treatments. A barrier also could be the provider’s limited knowledge about available networks of nonpharmacologic care providers in the community. Organization leaders can support access by providing information about local resources for patient referral.

**Reference**


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**Requirement**

LD.04.03.13, EP 6: The organization facilitates practitioner and pharmacist access to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program databases.

**Note:** This element of performance is applicable in any state that has a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program database, whether querying is voluntary or is mandated by state regulations for all patients prescribed opioids.

**Rationale**

Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) aggregate prescribing and dispensing data submitted by pharmacies and dispensing practitioners. When used together with other assessment strategies and tools, PDMPs can assist providers in preventing misuse and diversion of prescription medications. A link on the homepage of the electronic health record (EHR) to all relevant PDMPs in the geographic areas served by the organization would facilitate access. The Joint Commission does not mandate that organizations use PDMPs prior to prescribing an opioid because of the limited availability of current databases in many locations. However, some states (e.g., Massachusetts) require use of PDMPs prior to prescribing an opioid; organizations will be assessed on compliance with state law.

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### Provision of Care, Treatment, and Services

**PC.01.02.07: The organization assesses and manages the patient’s pain and minimizes the risks associated with treatment.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>PC.01.02.07, EP 1: The organization has defined criteria to screen, assess, and reassess pain that are consistent with the patient’s age, condition, and ability to understand.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Organizations need to develop systems for pain screening and assessment in order to support appropriate individualized pain treatment and perioperative pain management. The organization is responsible for ensuring that appropriate screening and assessment tools are readily available and used appropriately. The tools required to adequately assess pain may differ depending on a patient’s age, condition, ability to understand, and whether pain is acute or chronic. For example, chronic pain generally requires more extensive patient assessment, including various domains of physical and functional impairment.</td>
</tr>
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| Requirement | PC.01.02.07, EP 3: The organization treats the patient’s pain or refers the patient for treatment. 
Note: Treatment strategies for pain include nonpharmacologic, pharmacologic, or a combination of approaches. |
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<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Referral may be necessary for patients who need more extensive assessment or require treatments and monitoring that exceed the clinical expertise and capabilities of the individual provider. This may include patients with complex pain management requirements, pediatric patients with chronic nonmalignant pain disorders, or patients with advanced perioperative needs related to opioid tolerance.</td>
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Reference


Requirement

PC.01.02.07, EP 4: The organization develops a pain treatment plan based on evidence-based practices and the patient’s clinical condition, past medical history, and pain management goals.

Note: For ambulatory surgical centers: A pain treatment plan relates to the procedure and treatment provided by the organization.

Rationale

Differences in the experience of acute or chronic pain may be caused by pain pathophysiology, risk factors, comorbidities, and psychosocial characteristics. These individual variations support an individualized model of pain management, as well as responsible transition of care across care settings to support ongoing care needs. In some instances, an individualized approach to treatment and monitoring is necessary and safe because insufficient clinical guidance exists in areas such as evidence on postoperative opioid tapering protocols.

Reference


Requirement

PC.01.02.07, EP 5: The organization involves patients in the pain management treatment planning process through the following:
- Developing realistic expectations and measurable goals that are understood by the patient for the degree, duration, and reduction of pain
- Discussing the objectives used to evaluate treatment progress (for example, relief of pain and improved physical and psychosocial function)
- Providing education on pain management, treatment options, and safe use of opioid and non-opioid medications when prescribed

(See also RI.01.02.01, EPs 2, 4, 8; RI.01.03.01, EP 1)

Rationale

The Joint Commission’s technical advisory panel on pain management emphasized the importance of discussions between the patient and the provider/care team about realistic goals and expectations for the trajectory of pain, especially when the outcomes of pain treatment are uncertain. It is important to identify domains of function or quality of life issues that the patient values, and prioritize improvement in these areas to increase satisfaction with treatment progress.
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**Reference***

**Requirement**
PC.01.02.07, EP 7: Based on the patient’s condition, the organization reassesses and responds to the patient’s pain through the following:
- Evaluation and documentation of response(s) to pain intervention(s)
- Progress toward pain management goals including functional ability (for example, improved pain, physical function, quality of life, mental and cognitive symptoms, sleep habits, functioning in life roles)

*Note: This bullet is not applicable to ambulatory surgical centers, episodic care, urgent/immediate care.*
- Side effects of treatment
- Risk factors for adverse events caused by the treatment
(See also PC.01.02.03, EP 3)

**Rationale**
The patient is reassessed as necessary based on his or her plan for care or changes in his or her condition. Reassessment should be completed to determine if the intervention is working or if the patient is experiencing adverse effects. Unidimensional reassessment based on numeric pain scales alone is inadequate. The Joint Commission’s technical advisory panel stressed the importance of reassessing how pain affects function and the ability to make progress towards treatment goals. For example, after major abdominal surgery the goal of pain control may be the patient’s ability to take a breath without excessive pain. Over the next few days, the goal of pain control may be the ability to sit up in bed or walk to the bathroom without limitation due to pain.

**Reference***


**Requirement**
PC.01.02.07, EP 8: The organization educates the patient and family on discharge plans related to pain management including the following:
- Pain management plan of care
- Side effects of pain management treatment
- If applicable, activities of daily living, including the home environment, that might exacerbate pain or reduce effectiveness of the pain management plan of care, as well as strategies to address these issues
- Safe use, storage, and disposal of opioids when prescribed

**Rationale**
Patients perceive good patient-provider communication and education as indicators of high quality care. Discharge education is an opportunity for the provider/care team to engage the patient in a discussion on the pain management plan and opioid safety.

**Reference***

**Performance Improvement**

**PI.02.01.01: The organization compiles and analyzes data.**

**Requirement**
PI.02.01.01, EP 19: The organization monitors the use of opioids to determine if they are being prescribed safely. (See also LD.04.03.13, EP 1)

**Rationale**
Cautious opioid prescribing for chronic and acute pain is promoted in clinical practice guidelines and regulatory policies. Organizations can define metrics related to the use of opioids to identify priority areas for practice improvement and resource allocation.
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Not a complete literature review.*