

## ACOEM Commitment Statement

The American College of Occupational and Environmental (ACOEM) represents more than 4,200 physicians and other health care professionals who specialize in occupational and environmental medicine (OEM). ACOEM is the nation's largest medical society dedicated to promoting the health of workers through preventive medicine, clinical care, disability management, research, and education. Chronic pain and opioid abuse and misuse are important issues for OEM physicians whose practice often involves treating or managing patients with chronic pain related to workplace injury and illness.

ACOEM believes that addressing both the treatment of non-cancer-related chronic pain and the potential abuse and misuse of opioids in the United States requires a combination of steps. These include 1) improved education for physicians and patients on potential issues related to treatment; 2) expanded research on the impact of opioids on patients; 3) better utilization of tools aimed at reducing abuse such as prescription drug monitoring programs; and 4) the use of evidence-based, best-practice guidelines regarding chronic pain treatment.

For more than 20 years, ACOEM has been developing evidence-based treatment guidelines for the practice of OEM including its Opioids Guideline (April 2017),<sup>1</sup> and Chronic Pain Guideline (May 2017).<sup>2</sup> These guidelines offer a framework of clinical practices that can help decrease the inappropriate and harmful use of opioids — while recognizing the need to treat patients with non-cancer chronic pain. The ACOEM *Practice Guidelines* address the best evidence-based and multi-specialty approved care for non-cancer chronic pain, recommending that treatment should primarily focus on aerobic exercise/ endurance, active strengthening therapy, and self-management of pain — including techniques such as cognitive behavioral therapy, functional goals, and appropriate use of non-opioid medication. However, when a short trial of opioids is recommended, ACOEM also encourages the use of an Opioid Treatment Agreement to document patient education, understanding, acknowledgement of potential benefits, adverse effects, and agreement with the expectations of opioid use.

As ACOEM focuses on the health and safety of workers and workplaces, its guidelines emphasize the importance of not using opioids for patients who perform safety-sensitive jobs (including operating motor vehicles, other modes of transportation, forklift driving, overhead crane operation, heavy equipment operation and other tasks involving high levels of cognitive function and judgment.) It is through the development of practice guidelines and annual educational sessions on opioids that ACOEM demonstrates its commitment to controlling the inappropriate use of prescription opioids to ensure that workers and workplaces remain safe.

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<sup>1</sup>Hegmann KT, et al., eds. Opioids guideline. In: *Occupational Medicine Practice Guidelines: Evaluation and Management of Common Health Problems and Functional Recovery in Workers*. Reed Group, 2017. MDGuidelines®. Reed Group, Ltd. [www.mdguidelines.com](http://www.mdguidelines.com).

<sup>2</sup>Hegmann KT, et al., eds. Chronic pain guideline. In: *Occupational Medicine Practice Guidelines: Evaluation and Management of Common Health Problems and Functional Recovery in Workers*. Reed Group, 2017. MDGuidelines®. Reed Group, Ltd. [www.mdguidelines.com](http://www.mdguidelines.com).