

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION WRITING PRESCRIBING GUIDELINES

Striving to curb opioid epidemic

By Markian Hawryluk
WesCom News Service

The Food and Drug Administration is developing new opioid prescribing guidelines that would tailor the duration of the prescriptions to specific patient conditions.

Speaking at a provider roundtable with Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, on Tuesday in Bend, FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said the agency was working with provider groups and the National Academy of Medicine to determine what amount of prescription pain medication would be appropriate after various surgeries and procedures, instead of relying on the current one-size-fits-all approach.

Prescribing guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, say that three days or less of opioids are often sufficient and that more than seven days will rarely be needed, but do not differentiate based on condition.

"From my perspective, one of the concerns about the five-day, seven-day sort of limit is the 14 days becomes seven days, but the two days becomes seven days," Gottlieb said. "So you're going to be bringing some prescriptions down to a more appropriate duration, but you're also going to be bringing prescriptions that are shorter to a longer duration."



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The commissioner said the guidelines will focus initially on acute care conditions where overprescribing has been rampant. Agency data suggests that patients often need opioids for only one or two days after laparoscopic gallbladder or hernia surgeries, but may need painkillers for a week or more after a heart bypass or orthopedic procedures.

Gottlieb is also leading a joint effort with cancer groups to develop better guidelines for opioid use to treat cancer pain, but the agency will not be looking at new guidelines for chronic pain conditions at this time.

Gottlieb spoke just two days before an Oregon committee plans to begin reviewing a proposal that would limit Medicaid coverage for five broad chronic pain conditions to 90 days of opioid pain relievers and would

force patients who have been taking opioids for longer to be tapered off those medications within a year. Oregon implemented a similar strategy for low back pain two years ago.

While Gottlieb said the agency wasn't focused on what states were doing with respect to opioid limits, he spoke about the need to balance efforts to address overprescribing and give doctors the flexibility to prescribe opioids for those who need them.

"There are certain patients for whom chronic use is appropriate," Gottlieb said. "We need to recognize that and allow for that."

Rick Treleaven, director of Redmond-based Best-Care Treatment Services, expressed concerns that after years of promoting opioid use, the pendulum was swinging too far the other way at both the federal and

the state level.

"We're getting so tight again with the pain medication, that it's inhumane," he said at the roundtable. "We've got to find that middle ground."

The wide-ranging discussion with local Central Oregon health officials, held at the Oregon State University, Cascades campus, touched on a number of opioid-related topics.

- Walden touted the 57 separate opioid measures passed by the House Energy and Commerce committee he chairs and rolled into H.R. 6, passed by the House in June. Senate leaders are now working on their own version of the opioid bill, which will then have to be reconciled with the House version.

"Hopefully, in September, we hope to get it on the president's desk," Walden said. "I don't anticipate major changes."

- Included in the House bill was a measure to allow providers treating patients with addiction to coordinate care with those patients' other medical providers. Doctors have complained that a privacy measure last updated in 1987 was preventing better integration of their care.

- Gottlieb reiterated the agency's commitment to developing new abuse-de-

terrent formulations of pain medications. Some attempts by drug makers to produce abuse-deterrent drugs have run into hurdles, causing the manufacturers to withdraw from the approval process. But Gottlieb said there were new technologies and novel approaches that had merit.

"I think they can be potentially very effective," he said.

- The FDA issued new rules on Monday that would allow drug makers to get approval for addiction treatments without having to prove they could get patients with addictions completely off of opioids.

"That was a high threshold to hit," Gottlieb said. "If you could have a treatment, for example, that cuts down the risk of overdose or cuts down on craving, that might be an important adjunct to an overall approach to care."

- Gottlieb said that while the U.S. has made progress in reducing overprescribing of opioids, the progress has been more than offset by the increase in illicit opioids, such as fentanyl, flowing into the country.

"The amount of illicit drugs is dramatically more than the reduction that we've seen," he said. "It's being backfilled with fentanyl."

- The agency has received new authority and funding

to ramp up efforts to intercept illicit substances and unapproved drugs coming into the U.S. by mail. Gottlieb said more than 800 million packages were mailed to the U.S. last year, and this year, the number could exceed 1 trillion. That provides a gap through which illicit substances such as fentanyl can be shipped into the U.S. "What we're trying to do," he said, "is plug those gaps."

- Crook County Health Director Muriel Delavergne-Brown raised concerns about the rising cost of and difficulty of obtaining Narcan, the drug used to reverse opioid overdoses. The county health department supplies the Prineville Police Department and the Crook County sheriff's deputies with the medication but is facing challenges in acquiring sufficient supply.

- Several providers at the roundtable raised concerns over the continued prescribing of opioids and benzodiazepines, a combination that has been shown to dramatically increase the risk of overdose.

"It's kind of the shadow epidemic to the opioid epidemic," said Kim Swanson, chair of the Central Oregon Pain Standards task force. "And it's not been hit as hard with education or guidelines."

GOATS

Continued from Page 1B

A history of successes — and one failure

Since ODFW sold two mountain goat tags in 1997 (one for the Elkhorns, one for the Hurricane Creek area in the northern Wallowas), the first such tags in almost three decades, the number of tags has risen along with the goat population.

Although the Elkhorns have been the sole Oregon source of goats for transplants, the Wallowas have the longer recorded history with the animals.

(There's no definitive proof that mountain goats are native to either range, although a report from 1905 suggests that's the case. Other accounts also refer to mountain goats in Oregon, including journals from the Lewis and Clark expedition, but some biologists believe the earlier observers, when writing about mountain goats, were actually referring to bighorn sheep, which have a more thoroughly documented historical presence in the region.)

ODFW first released mountain goats in the Wallowas in 1950, hauling in animals trapped in Washington state.

By the 1960s the Wallowas' goat population had grown enough to prompt ODFW to issue 23 hunting tags during the period 1965-68.

That experiment proved a failure, though, and within a few years the Wallowa goat population had plummeted, said Dick Humphreys, a retired ODFW biologist who worked in Baker City from 1966 to 1994.

ODFW ended hunting in the Wallowas after the 1968 season based on the fear that hunting the previous four years — in particular the harvest of nanny goats — was the major cause for the population decline.

The agency resumed goat transplants in 1983, when six were released along Pine Creek in the Elkhorns.

In 1985 ODFW released eight goats at Pine Creek and eight along Hurricane Creek in the Wallowas, and in 1986 the agency transplanted seven goats to Pine Creek and eight to Hurricane Creek.

Primus said the southern half of the Elkhorns, near where the goats were released in the 1980s, remains the favorite haunt for the animals.

Goats were so prevalent at Twin Lakes a few years ago that ODFW and the Forest Service posted signs at trailheads warning hikers and campers that the animals, which have a great affinity for salt, might barge into their camps to forage among backpacks, clothes and other items.

Primus said he hasn't received complaints from hikers about aggressive goats the past couple years, but he said it's not likely that the animals, which have very little hunting pressure, have changed their behavior substantially.

Goats have spread throughout the Elkhorns, although in relatively low numbers outside that original core area, which includes the Twin Lakes, Goodrich and Pine Creek basins, Primus said.

He said goat hunters the past two years have reported finding nice billies — ODFW recommends hunters kill billies, based on the effects of the less-discriminate hunting in the Wallowas in the 1960s — in the northern Elkhorns near Anthony Lakes.

During the census last month, surveyors counted 18 goats while hiking along the Elkhorn Crest Trail from Anthony Lakes south to Mount Ruth, a distance of about eight miles, and another five goats, all billies, near Van Patten Lake.

Mountain goats in the Elk-

horns seemed unperturbed by the harsh winter of 2016-17, Primus said.

That's not especially surprising, he said, because the goats, unlike deer and elk, generally don't migrate to lower elevations during winter, preferring instead to remain near the tops of the Elkhorns' ridges and peaks where they're accustomed to wintry conditions.

Primus said that winter, though unusually cold and snowy in Baker Valley, was much closer to typical in the alpine environment. He said goats take advantage of the strong winds, which scour away snow from steep slopes to expose the plants the animals rely on for food.

Although all the goats roaming the Elkhorns today are offspring from those original 21 animals released in the 1980s, Primus said biologists have not seen any evidence that the herd is suffering from a lack of genetic diversity.

That problem likely would be reflected initially in reduced kid numbers and survival rates, but neither trend is apparent, Primus said.

NOTICE OF ROAD WORK

US 30 / OR7 / OR82 / OR237 / CHIP SEAL

(La Grande-Baker / Whitney / Wallowa Lake/ Union-North Powder Hwy's.)

Beginning **August 6** the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will be chip sealing sections of OR7 (Whitney Hwy.), US30 (La Grande-Baker Hwy.), OR82 (Wallowa Lake Hwy.) and OR237 (Union-North Powder Highway) in the Baker and Union County areas.

- **Aug. 6-7:** I-84 freeway on/off ramps at Exit 306, then head toward Baker City on U.S. 30 to intersection of Auburn St. and Main St. at mile point 53.96 (near Chevron Station in Baker City). This work is expected to take about 2 days. Exit 306 will be closed August 8 for chip sealing of freeway on and off ramps.
- **Aug. 6-15:** OR82 between Elgin and Minan, mile points 20-34.
- **Aug. 7-9:** OR7 between mile post 35.42 near bottom of Mason Dam and mile post 41.85 at Salisbury Junction, where OR7 intersects with OR245. This work is expected to take about 2 days.
- **Aug. 13-15:** US30 between mile post 49.85 at Hughes Lane in Baker City and mile post 32.86 at west city limits of North Powder. Expect to be working in Haines on Aug. 14 and end at North Powder on Aug. 15.
- **Aug. 16-21:** OR237 (Union-North Powder) between mile post 22.8 (five miles south of Union) and North Powder west city limits, at mile post 32.45. This work is expected to take about 3 days. Chip seal through North Powder expected to occur Aug. 21.

NOTE: Dates are subject to change, depending on weather conditions and other factors.

PARKING RESTRICTIONS: During chip seal activities in downtown areas, vehicles will not be allowed to park in work zones along US30 in the Baker City and Haines area, or along OR237 in North Powder.

IRRIGATION PIVOTS/WATER SPRINKLERS: Local residents are asked to adjust irrigation pivots and lawn sprinklers to avoid spraying water onto the roadway, as this creates problems for chip rock application.

TRAVEL IMPACTS: Expect up to 20-minute delays, reduced speeds, loose rock on the roadway, flaggers, and pilot cars directing single lane traffic through the work zones. Minor delays during nighttime/early morning hours for road sweeping. Please reduce speed and watch for construction activities in the area. Plan extra travel time and slow down to prevent loose rock from flying onto other vehicles. Crews will sweep roadway, but expect some loose rock to be present for several days after chip seal.

REQUEST TO RANCH AND FARM OWNERS: ODOT is asking highway users to keep farm equipment off the impacted highway sections during and up to two days after the chip seal operations. To prevent chip rock adhesion problems due to animal waste on the roadway, ranchers are requested [please contact the ODOT maintenance manager listed on attached map](#) and advise of any plans to move livestock on impacted highway sections during spring or summer months this year.

Your local ODOT maintenance crews appreciate your support and cooperation during this paving operation.
For other eastern Oregon highway construction project information contact Tom Strandberg @ 541-963-1330, email: thomas.m.strandberg@odot.state.or.us or visit www.tinyurl.com/odot-region5

Spring Cleaning 101

What is household hazardous waste?
HHW is anything labeled toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive or explosive. These materials can threaten family health and the safety of pets and wildlife.

What are some examples of hazardous waste?
Aerosols, Bleach, Drain Cleaners, Metal Polish, Mothballs, Oven Cleaners, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Ammonia-based Cleaners, Mercury Thermometers, Wood Polishes, Waxes, Fertilizers, Insecticides, Herbicides, Rodenticides, Spa and Pool Chemicals, Roofing Compounds, Antifreeze, Batteries, Motor Oil, Paint Strippers and Thinners, Gasoline and more.

Where can I safely dispose of my hazardous waste?
La Grande Facility: Open to any resident of the three counties every other Tuesday, 8am-12 noon. By appointment, however, small labeled quantities accepted daily. (541) 963-5459.
Baker City Facility: Open the first Wednesday of each month, 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 523-2626.
Enterprise Facility: Open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12 noon. By appointment only. (541) 426-3332.

What you should know about the disposal of household hazardous waste.

Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year!

The average home can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of hazardous waste.