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## FDA Proposes Fixed-Quantity Opioid Blister Packaging to Address Opioid Crisis

In an effort to mitigate the ongoing opioid crisis, the FDA is requesting that certain immediate-release opioids be made available in fixed-quantity blister packaging. The FDA is focusing on prescribing the “right size” of opioid pain medication and reducing unnecessary exposure to opioids, while ensuring appropriate access to patients experiencing severe pain.

“We know that for many people addicted to opioids, their first opioid exposure was a prescription opioid. We also know that patients are often prescribed significantly more opioid pills than they actually use,” said FDA Commissioner Norman E. “Ned” Sharpless, MD. “This excess supply of opioids provides opportunities for misuse, abuse, overdose and development of addiction, as well as the potential for these leftover pills to end up in the hands of a child, friend or relative for whom they aren’t intended.”

Published studies have found that most patients used significantly fewer pills than prescribed for minimally invasive surgeries and common acute pain conditions, according to the FDA.

The data showed that most patients used opioids for only one to three days following surgery, and took 15 pills or less. Patients usually stored unused pills in easily accessible locations, increasing the likelihood of future misuse, abuse, accidental poisoning, overdose and development of addiction, the agency explained.

Blister packaging medication in fixed doses of five, 10 or 15 count could promote prescribers to more carefully consider the dosage of opioids they prescribe, ultimately leading to less pills left in users’ cabinets and the possibility of reducing the risk for opioid addiction. However, this change in packaging would not prohibit clinicians from writing prescriptions for any amount of opioids they deem necessary for appropriate patient care.

Furthermore, the FDA is working with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine help advance the development of evidence-based opioid prescribing guidelines for treating severe pain. The commissioner added that the agency has launched an awareness campaign, Remove the Risk, to encourage the proper disposal of opioids in patients' homes.

—*Anna DeNelsky*