

Preventing Opioid Misuse and Diversion in Veterinary Practices

This E-blast from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) focuses on informing veterinarians of safe prescribing practices for opioid medications, diversion prevention, and educating pet owners and handlers about the risks of opioid misuse.



The rapid increase in use of prescription opioids has resulted in a national crisis of opioid overdose deaths and opioid use disorder (OUD). Some people with OUD are now looking to their local veterinary clinic for such drugs. Incidents include individuals using their pets to obtain tramadol and ketamine for their own use. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), for example, reports that ketamine theft from veterinary clinics is common because of its hallucinogenic properties (Jackson, 2017).

In this environment, veterinarians must be proactive, conscientious practitioners of safe prescribing of opioids and other sedative medications. The following approaches and practices are relevant to addressing this problem:

- **Follow American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA, 2018) Guidelines for Veterinary Prescription Drugs and Iowa Board of Veterinary Medicine (2008) Standards of Practice.** These cover topics such as:
 - Making treatment decisions that are based on sound clinical judgment and current medical information and comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
 - Properly labeling a prescription drug before dispensing.
 - Maintaining appropriate record keeping.
 - Dispensing drugs only in quantities required for the treatment of the animal.
 - Avoiding unlimited refills or other activity that may result in misuse of drugs.
 - Using drugs in accordance with its labeling.
 - Using a veterinarian–client–patient relationship agreement.
 - Reporting use and sale of a drug without a prescription to the state authority and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- **Prevent Prescription Leftovers.**
Opioids prescribed for pets are a potential source of drugs for persons with OUD. Dispensing medication only in quantities required for the treatment of pets decreases the amount of leftovers that remain in people’s homes and available for diversion. Avoid unlimited refills for opioids and require regular re-evaluations for chronic conditions before prescribing more in order to reduce leftovers and the misuse of the drugs.
- **Safe Dispensing, Storage, and Disposal of Opioid Medications.**
The diversion of opioid medications from their intended use is an ongoing problem that has fueled the opioid crisis. As prescribers and dispensers of these controlled substances, veterinarians can take steps to limit diversion through safe dispensing, storage and disposal practices at their facilities. These steps include:
 - **Maintain strict inventory and dispensing records**
 - **Store medications securely**
 - **Dispose of medications properly**



- **Educating Pet Owners and Handlers on the Risks of Opioid Misuse.**

Opioids intended for the treatment of animals can pose risks for owners and handlers. Veterinarians can educate owners and handlers about critical safety precautions. These steps include:

- **Potential for misuse.** Opioids are powerful medications that, if taken for purposes not intended by the prescriber, can result in overdose, OUD or death. Family members, visitors and handlers may illegally obtain such medications for their own use and/or for sale to others. Opioids prescribed by a physician for human consumption may be similar to medications prescribed by a veterinarian for a pet, but the prescription for the animal may vary significantly in type, dosage and duration, and result in unintended consequences if diverted to human use.
- **Potential for theft.** Opioids are medications that are sought by individuals with OUD. Securely storing a pet's medicines will reduce the risk of theft by anyone visiting the home of the pet owner.
- **Secure storage.** Opioid medications must be stored securely in a locked cabinet or container to avoid unauthorized access and use, as well as accidental exposure. Count and keep a record of opioid pills to know if any go missing.
- **Directions for administration.** Prescribers must review directions with the pet owner for the administration of the medication to limit opportunities for misuse. Veterinarians should specify dosage, frequency, duration, and other elements for effective treatment.
- **Safe disposal of unused and expired opioid medications.** Methods for safe disposal of unused or expired medications should be discussed with owners and handlers (FDA, 2017). Prescribers should discourage pet owners from flushing unused drugs down the drain to avoid contaminating water supplies that may potentially harm humans and animals that ingest the water.



References

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