Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids Safely

The National Patient Safety Agency recognised that unfamiliarity with opioid analgesics can lead to serious prescribing and administration errors. The flowchart below defines the steps to be taken when prescribing opioid analgesics. The key points to minimising the risks are; familiarity with the therapeutic characteristics of the opioid, confirmation of any previous formulation and dose if previously prescribed and the starting dose if newly prescribed. See also the Safe Prescribing and Administration of Opioids for Analgesia poster on the Trust website.

Decision/request to prescribe opioid analgesic

Is prescriber familiar with therapeutic characteristics of opioid to be prescribed?

No

Prescriber to familiarise themselves with therapeutic characteristics of opioid to be prescribed or seek appropriate advice.

Yes

Is patient already taking opioid without a treatment break?

Yes

Check that the patient is still taking their current opioid medication. Double check the current medicine, dose and formulation by utilizing:

- Patient
- Carer
- GP practice records or summary care records
- Repeat prescription form
- Old drug chart

Prescribe appropriate dose.

No

Prescribe starting dose.