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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# Board seeks new rules to address pain medication prescribing issues

DES MOINES, IA -- The Iowa Board of Medicine is taking more steps to help physicians improve patient care by reducing their patients' risk of addiction, abuse and diversion of controlled substances prescribed for chronic pain.

The Board is seeking to amend administrative rules to emphasize screening tools that physicians can use when prescribing pain medications, and to heighten physicians' awareness of appropriate diagnosis and treatment of chronic pain.

The new rules:

- Require the use of a physician-patient agreement for patients treated with controlled substances. An existing rule encourages physicians to use an agreement that specifies the use of the medication and the consequences for misuse.
- Encourage physicians to use drug testing on chronic pain patients to ensure they are receiving appropriate levels of prescribed medications and are not abusing other drugs.
- Encourage physicians to use the Iowa Prescription Monitoring Program established by the Iowa Board of Pharmacy. The confidential online database tracks a patient's prescriptions for controlled substances, allowing physicians to know, before they prescribe, whether the patient has had a recent similar prescription from another physician.
- Require physicians to complete a two-hour class on chronic pain management. The mandatory education would be every five years for physicians who regularly provide primary health care to patients.

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In addition, the Board is making available to physicians a copy of “Responsible Opioid Prescribing,” a handbook on the use of controlled substances for the treatment of pain. The book is published by the Federation of State Medical Boards.

The amendments, approved by the Board on February 11, were developed by a Board ad hoc committee tasked to recommend strategies to help physicians reduce patients’ abuse and misuse of pain medications.

In the past two years, the Board charged five physicians and issued confidential reprimands to another six for inappropriate pain medication practices, such as prescribing controlled substances to drug-seeking patients. At the start of 2011, the Board had 25 open cases involving similar allegations.

Prescription drug abuse is the fastest-growing drug problem in the United States, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The latest National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that 56 percent of people age 12 or older who used pain relievers non-medically in the past year got the drug from a relative or friend. Another 18 percent said they got the drug from a doctor.

Siroos Shirazi, M.D., Board chair, said the amendments strengthen the Board’s pain medication management rules, which require physicians to adhere to a general standard of care, such as conducting thorough examinations before dispensing prescriptions or offering alternatives like physical therapy to work in place of or in conjunction with medications.

“For physicians who don’t know their patients really well, the screening tools are helpful in determining appropriate treatment options, and can identify diversion, misuse or abuse of controlled substances,” he said.

The amendments involve 653 Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 11.4 (continuing education and training requirements) and Chapter 13.2 (standards of practice for appropriate pain management). A public hearing on the amendments will be held at 2 p.m. March 29 at the Board’s office, 400 SW Eighth Street, Suite C, Des Moines.