Suicide-Related Risks Associated with Prescription Opioid Deprescribing

Performer: Kaiser Foundation Hospitals

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Project Duration: 9/6/2019 – 9/15/2022

Regulatory Science Challenge:

As of October 2019, only a few small outcome studies of opioid deprescribing (discontinuation or tapering) had been published. This limited body of evidence provided little guidance for physicians to draw upon when tapering or discontinuing a patient's opioid therapy. Concerns exist that abrupt discontinuation or rapid/unsupported tapering may result in unintended consequences including suicides. However, the scope of post-deprescribing suicides and suicide attempts, as well as which patients are most vulnerable, are largely unknown.

Project Description:

This project assesses overdose and suicide-related outcomes associated with prescription opioid deprescribing in a large, multisite, nationally representative, observational study using data from six health systems. This study is further designed to identify factors that can mitigate associated risks and reduce preventable harm related to opioid deprescribing.

Project Goals:

1. Determine the prevalence of unintentional fatal or non-fatal opioid related overdoses, suicide attempts, and suicides among patients who have discontinued or tapered prescription opioid use, as well as characterize associated deprescribing patterns.
2. Identify factors that moderate these adverse outcomes during and following prescription opioid discontinuation or tapering.
3. Describe/characterize patient/family experiences of opioid deprescribing and provide recommendations to prevent adverse outcomes associated with deprescribing.