

It's all over the news and has communities scrambling to find an answer. Recently, Illinois reported that the number of overdose deaths in the state involving opioids increased 76-percent between 2013 and 2016. The numbers are prompting Governor Bruce Rauner to create a special task force to address the problem.

For medical providers the issue becomes a very delicate balancing act between providing patients with acute or chronic pain the relief they need, but not to the point where opiates become the patient's only option.

Dr. Daniel Butterbach, emergency room physician at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center, says every effort is made to give these patients a small dose until they can follow up with their doctor.

*"By starting a patient on a lower dose of an opiate pain medication, they are going to be slower to develop tolerance, which is one of the problems with opiate medications," says Dr. Butterbach*

Dr. Butterbach believes part of the problem is a lack of consistency among medical providers when it comes to prescribing opioid medications. He's attempting to correct that with the implementation of a protocol in the emergency room at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.

*"We enroll some of our patients who come the most frequently or who have the most concerning chronic pain and try to get them more consistent care," says Dr. Butterbach. Get them looped in to a primary care doctor and a pain specialist when possible."*

While they are very good medications that are proven to quickly relieve pain, Dr. Butterbach says plenty of over the counter medicines, like nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) are adequate alternatives. There are also non-medication options.

*"Especially when we are talking about patients who are having chronic pain. Injections or epidurals for chronic back pain, massage therapy, physical therapy."*

Dr. Butterbach advises that patients should not be frightened of taking a prescribed opiate as they are excellent at breaking a cycle of pain. The key is for the patient to work with their providers to simply use the medication to alleviate the initial severe pain and then develop a plan to reduce the dosage going forward.