



Medicare Star Rating Provider Tip Sheet

Concurrent Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines (COB)

Why This Measure Matters

The Concurrent Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines (COB) measure is a PQA-endorsed Medicare Part D Star Ratings measure.

- Lower rates indicate better Star performance and improved patient safety.
- Concurrent use increases the risk of respiratory depression, hospitalization, and fatal overdose.

Best Practices to Improve Star Performance

- Avoid initiating benzodiazepines in patients receiving opioids.
- Avoid initiating opioids in patients already on benzodiazepines.
- Use evidence-based alternatives for pain, anxiety, and insomnia.

Alternatives for Anxiety and Insomnia

- SSRIs/SNRIs (e.g., sertraline, escitalopram, venlafaxine, duloxetine)
- Buspirone, Trazodone, Mirtazapine
- Sleep hygiene and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Alternatives for Pain Management

- Physical therapy and exercise programs
- NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, celecoxib)
- SNRIs and anticonvulsants (duloxetine, pregabalin, gabapentin)
- Topical therapies (lidocaine, diclofenac gel)
- Mind-body practices (yoga, tai chi, meditation)



If Concurrent Use Is Clinically Necessary

- Use the lowest effective doses and limit duration.
- Taper long-standing medications gradually, whenever possible discontinue.
- Continually evaluate the need for
- Educate patients on overdose warning signs.
- Prescribe naloxone when appropriate.