

Less than Five Opioid Pills Required after Knee Arthroscopy – a Retrospective Analysis

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Background

Nearly 1 million knee arthroscopies are performed each year in the United States; however, there remains a lack of evidence-based guidelines for postoperative opioid prescription.[1] Current postoperative prescriptions for knee arthroscopy range from 15 to 60 opioid pills.[2-4] Due to the rapidly growing opioid epidemic, physicians are urged to reevaluate these pain management methods. The purpose of this study is to create the first evidence-based opioid prescribing guideline for patients undergoing knee arthroscopy.

Methods

A retrospective study of 75 patients was conducted with patients who had undergone outpatient knee arthroscopy over the past year. To avoid single surgeon bias, patients of three separate orthopaedic surgeons were analyzed. Patients were called and queried on the following metrics: total postoperative opioid consumption, preoperative opioid consumption (defined as within 3 months of surgery), smoking status, and history of depression. Total number of opiates prescribed and number of refills were queried from each patient's chart.

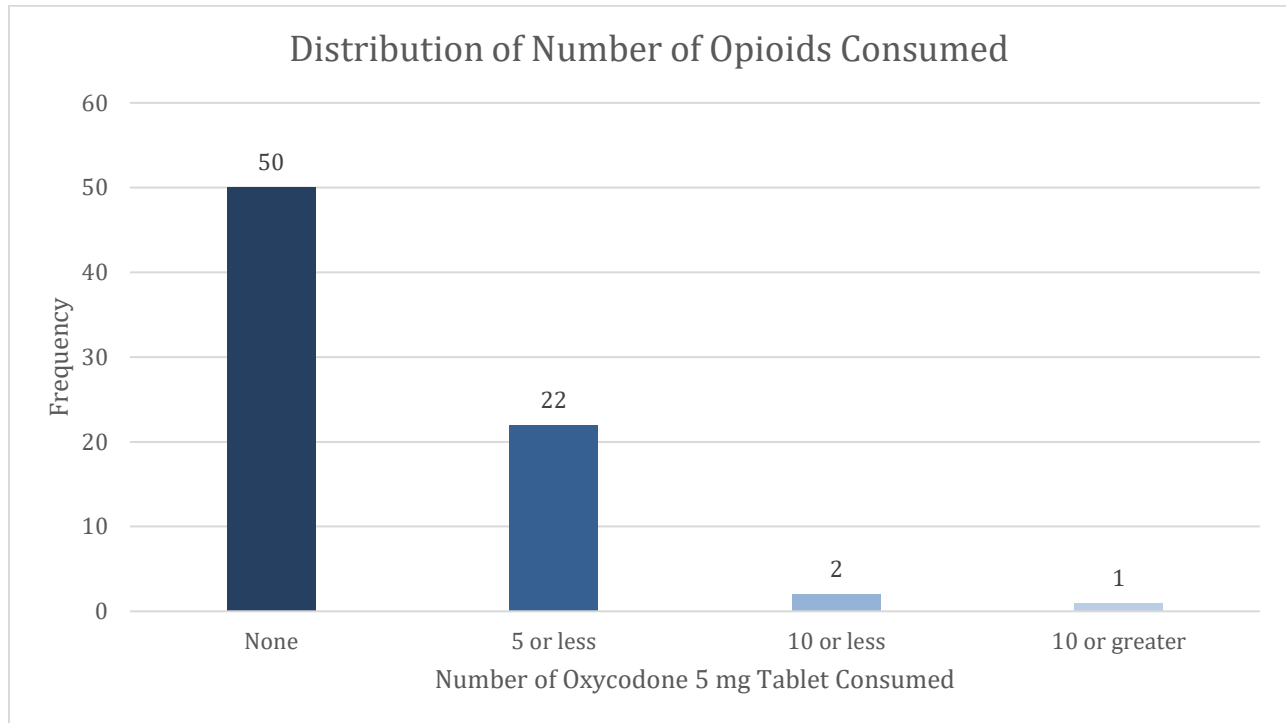
Results

Patients were prescribed a median of 5 oxycodone 5mg pills (37.5 oral morphine equivalents). Median postoperative opioid consumption was 0 pills, with a mean of 1.2 pills (9.3 OMEs). 97% of patients did not obtain refills, and 67% of patients did not consume any opioids. 96% of all patients consumed ≤ 5 pills.

Conclusions

Patients in this study clearly consume fewer opioids than prescribed, with the majority opting to forego opioids altogether. These results suggest that patients undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery should be prescribed a maximum of 5 oxycodone 5mg tablets, a stark contrast to recent consensus-based guidelines of 15-60 pills.[5] No patient in this study required more than 15 pills. This evidence based guideline can be extremely powerful in reducing the incidence of opioid addiction by drastically reducing the amount of unused narcotics.

Figure 1. Distribution of Patient’s Postoperative Opioid Consumption Following Knee Arthroscopy. Patients in this retrospective analysis were queried for their opioid consumption following recent knee surgery (within one year). 96% of all patients consumed 5 or fewer opioids.



References

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