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WHO issues new guidelines on paediatric chronic pain management

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New WHO Guidelines on the management of chronic pain in children provide recommended physical, psychological and pharmacological interventions for pain relief in children aged 0-19 years. The guideline supports Member States and their partners to develop and implement national and local policies, regulations, pain management protocols and best practices for pain relief.

Care for children with chronic pain must be child- and family-centred and included in all universal health coverage schemes.

Based on the most current scientific evidence, the recommendations include three areas of interventions: physical therapy, psychological therapy, and pharmacological management, which may include the use of morphine for end-of-life-care or when chronic pain is associated with life-limiting conditions.

WHO defines the terms “end-of-life-care” as palliative care for people in the final weeks or months of life to die with dignity) and “life-limiting conditions” as illnesses for which there is no cure and an early death is expected, but with which a person may continue to live for several more years.

The guideline highlights the importance of opioid stewardship to address worldwide concerns about harms arising from misuse of these medicines. Opioid stewardship refers to a series of strategies and interventions involving the appropriate procurement, storage, prescribing and use of opioids, as well as the disposal of unused opioids when opioids are appropriately prescribed for the treatment and management of specific medical conditions.

The guideline includes 10 best practice statements which apply to all aspects of the clinical care of a child with chronic pain, including the planning, implementation and delivery of physical, psychological and pharmacological interventions.

This guideline replaces the discontinued “WHO guidelines on the pharmacological treatment of persisting pain in children with medical illnesses” (2012).