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Opioid Education

A photograph of a female doctor with blonde hair, wearing a patterned blazer and a stethoscope, sitting at a desk and talking to a patient with long brown hair. The patient is seen from the back, wearing a dark green shirt. The background is a bright, clinical setting with a plant on the left.

The Dangers of Opioids:
Ask. Understand.

It's no secret that misuse of opioid medicine has become a local and national health crisis. But how can drugs prescribed by a doctor be bad? We're here to answer some questions you may have about opioids – and share ways you can help protect yourself and others.

What are opioids?

Opioids are strong drugs prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain. You may know them by names like **Fentanyl, Hydrocodone, Morphine or Oxycodone**.

Why are they dangerous?

Each year, more people die from taking opioids than in automobile accidents. It's also a leading cause of unemployment, missed work and lost income.

There are good reasons to use opioids. They can help treat serious pain, like the kind caused by an injury or health condition. The danger comes when you take them too often, for too long, or in doses that are too high. Opioids can be habit-forming and lead to misuse and cause harm – or even death.

Who's at risk?

Anyone can become addicted to opioids. For many people, it happens by accident. It doesn't mean they're bad or weak. But it's important to know that some people are more likely to misuse opioids than others. People with a history of substance abuse or who suffer from health problems like depression or sleep apnea should be extra careful when taking opioids.

How are we fighting the opioid addiction crisis?

As a company, it's personal for us. Our home state of Tennessee is ranked among the highest in misuse of opioids and opioid deaths. That's why we're working hard to fight for our members and their families.

We started this work in 2013, helping babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome and helping people know what to do with their unused prescriptions. We've also worked with a team of physician advisors who have guided us on how to change the way we pay for opioids to help make sure you only get them when they're the safest choice.

What you can do to protect yourself and others.

- Take opioids very carefully.
- Only take them if prescribed by your doctor for severe pain.
- Take the least amount possible to treat your pain.
- Stop taking the medicine or switch to an over-the-counter medicine when you start feeling better. This is one time it's okay to take medicine less often than your doctor prescribed. Never take more than your prescription says.
- Visit **countitlockitdropit.org** to learn how you can keep your household safe from drug misuse.

Know the signs of addiction and ask for help, if you need it.

- Visit tn.gov/opioids for more information on opioids, addiction and treatment.
- Talk to your doctor. Visit **bcbst.com/findadoctor** to find one near you.
- Call the 24/7 Tennessee Mental Health Crisis Hotline at **1-855-274-7471** to talk to someone anytime. Day or night.