

# PILL COUNT INSTRUCTIONS

Pill counts can play an important role in the management of controlled substances and are intended to assist in evaluating patients' use of their medications. Patients are to be instructed to bring their controlled substance medication(s) to their clinic visits. Pill counts may be routine (at every visit), random (patient selected for a random pill count), or targeted (suspicion of overuse or selling of the medications).

## Pill Count Process

Pill counts should always be completed in the presence of the patient. They can be performed by hand in the office using gloves while counting on a piece of plain paper. The pills should not be physically touched by staff. They should only be placed on these materials to avoid cross contamination with other controlled substances.

### Prior to Patient Arrival:

1. Open patient's medical record and review current prescription and dose
2. Calculate the number of pills that should remain based on prescription date and dosing frequency

### Upon Patient Arrival:

1. Empty medication from prescription container onto clean tray or piece of paper
2. The staff member reviews the pill/capsule shapes to ensure they are all the same medication and are the correct dose based on the last prescription. Medications can be cross-referenced with a standard pill identifier database
3. If multiple imprinted numbers are included in the prescription, the second staff member should call the dispensing pharmacy to confirm they actually dispensed these medications and ensure that the patient did not buy or borrow pills from others to get by the pill count
4. A significant deviation from expected vs. actual pill count of >25% suggests the patient has lost control over their use or security of the pills, or that they are selling the medication
5. **Always document date and the results of the pill count in the medical record and inform provider of findings. Provider should discuss variation with patient and document result of discussion.**
6. If substance abuse is suspected, tighter controls (more frequent follow-up visits, fewer pills prescribed with each prescription, changing to a less abusable medication, etc.) may be employed; however, if it is suspected that the patient is selling or giving away the medication, discontinuing medication prescribing would be appropriate.

**Pill counts are best utilized 1-2 weeks after the prescription is filled as it is usually most evident soon after filling the prescription that the patient may be misusing or abusing the medication.**

### **Pill Counts Should be Considered When...**

- There is an indication of medication misuse, overuse, or abuse
- There is a suspicion the patient is selling medications or giving them away
- The clinic is receiving reports via friends or family of patient overuse or selling
- A patient appears confused about the prescribing instructions or requests early refills
- There is a negative result for a prescribed controlled substance on a drug screening test