Introduction to Pain Management
The number one reason patients seek medical advice is pain. Pain management, however, can be complicated because of the subjective nature of this problem. Health care professionals must balance what patients tell them about their pain with what they know about the risks and benefits of the many pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatments. In addition, health care providers must know how to assess a patient’s level of pain, have good understanding of the patient’s personal background, and thoroughly communicate to the patient the goals of therapy and how medication is appropriately utilized.

What a Pharmacist Provides
Pharmacists involved in pain management provide a variety of services depending upon their practice setting. Most pharmacists are involved in conducting a thorough medication history. Medication history is crucial so that the pain management team understands what the patient has already tried to control the pain, how the patient responded to other therapies and what other medications may interact with pain management therapies. Pharmacists can be intimately involved in designing the treatment regimen in collaboration with other health care providers. Pharmacists counsel the patient on the goals of drug therapy and possible adverse effects as well as helpful hints to deal with side effects. Pharmacists teach patients how to correctly self-administer injections, apply skin patches and inhale nasal sprays for optimal pain relief. Personal interaction and dialogue are as important to appropriate pain management as the medications. Pharmacists in all settings communicate to patients and their caregivers the importance of taking the medications exactly as directed in order to improve the patient’s quality of life.

Over a six-month period, a hospital developed a novel, pharmacist-directed, pain management service. At nine months post-implementation, 1,335 interventions were documented with an estimated indirect cost savings of $1,622,449. Of these interventions, 81 percent were the result of prescriber consults, with opioid stewardship comprising the remaining 19 percent. The acceptance rate of pharmacist recommendations was 88 percent. The group won a Best Practices Award from the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists for this study.