
Patient Q&A: Medical Commission Suspends License of Seattle Pain Center Medical Director

Overview

- The Washington State Medical Commission is taking action against Frank Li, MD for substandard care.
- This action impacts Seattle Pain Centers' eight clinics across Washington (Everett, Seattle, Renton, Tacoma, Poulsbo, Olympia, Vancouver, and Spokane) and potentially 25,000 patients.
- The Medical Commission is working with the Department of Health, the Health Care Authority, Office of the Insurance Commissioner and the represented professional associations and regulators to coordinate resources and minimize gaps in care for affected patients.

What does this mean?

- If you are a patient at the Seattle Pain Center, your insurance carrier may no longer pay for visits to these clinics. You should contact your primary care practitioner and your insurance carrier as soon as possible to determine a plan for ongoing treatment.
- If you take a high dose of daily opioid medication and stop taking it suddenly, you may experience symptoms of withdrawal such as restlessness, nausea, diarrhea, muscle pain, or insomnia. Symptoms of withdrawal (<http://goo.gl/dXjND2>) can be unpleasant, but will not cause damage to your body. Symptoms can be milder if you are able to taper down your medication over time. Talk to your health care provider about this possibility before you run out of medication.
- If you have been taking a benzodiazepine (Xanax, Valium, Ativan, etc.) for a long time and stop suddenly, you may experience symptoms of withdrawal such as: severe anxiety, restlessness, and other serious side effects (<http://goo.gl/MSLZ4W>). Talk with your primary health care provider about the signs of benzodiazepine withdrawal and strategies to reduce your dosage and manage withdrawal symptoms.

How can I find a new practitioner?

- To avoid a disruption in care, contact your primary care practitioner and/or your health insurance plan for reassignment or referral.

What if I cannot find a new practitioner before I need a prescription refill?

- If you need immediate medical support, go to an urgent care clinic or the ER of your local hospital.

Can I still refill my current prescription?

- If you have an unfilled prescription from Seattle Pain Center practitioners, it may be valid. Talk to your pharmacist to confirm. If your pharmacist has questions, please refer them to the Pharmacy Commission: Phone: 360-236-4999 Fax: 360-236-2260.

Could I be addicted to my medications?

- Some people who take chronic narcotic medications can develop an addiction to them. Being addicted to something means you lose your ability to control how much you take. This can lead to problems with your job, health, relationships and ability to feel well.
- If you think you may have a problem controlling your use of narcotic medications, or taking too much, contact your primary care provider as there are new medications that can help treat narcotic addiction or the Washington Recovery Helpline at 1-866-789-1511.

[\(http://www.warecoveryhelpline.org/\)](http://www.warecoveryhelpline.org/)

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News Release



Medical
Quality
Assurance
Commission

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Contact: [Julie Graham](#), Communications Office

360-810-1628

Medical Commission Suspends Medical Director of Seattle Pain Centers *Action impacts eight clinics throughout Washington*

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Medical Commission immediately suspended the medical license of Frank D. Li (MD0049251) for alleged violations of the Uniform Disciplinary Act and for violation of the Washington State Pain Rules. Charges say Dr. Li consistently provided treatment that was an extreme departure from the standard of care, exposing patients of Seattle Pain Centers to risks of harm for opioid addiction, diversion, and overdose.

The Medical Commission alleges Dr. Li specifically sought Medicaid-enrolled patients with the intent to bill the maximum allowable amount by requiring unnecessary testing and procedures. Further, charges state, he intentionally employed recently graduated clinicians with little-to-no experience in pain management and that Li maintained unacceptable levels of oversight and management necessary to fulfill the duties of a medical director of a safe practice.

As the medical director for Seattle Pain Centers, Li established business practices that do not protect patient safety including: instituting “templated” recordkeeping regardless of type of patient visit; allowing clinical practice by providers before they’ve been credentialed by insurance; allowing providers to bill under another provider’s insurance number before securing their own; failing to appropriately respond to clearly demonstrated patient risk behaviors documented in medical records; and as medical director, failing to investigate reports of patient deaths or hospitalizations attributed to treatment received at Seattle Pain Centers.

Dr. Li must respond within 20 days of the Medical Commission issuing the order. If this happens, a “show cause” hearing must be held within 14 days of the request to determine if the summary suspension will remain in effect throughout the formal hearing process.

Li’s suspension requires any physician assistant who has a delegation agreement with Li to find another primary physician who can serve as sponsor. New delegation agreements must be approved by the Medical Commission before the providers can perform any health care service, including

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issuing of new prescriptions or renewals. The impacted physician assistants are being contacted immediately to ensure they're aware of the restrictions on their ability to practice until the Medical Commission approves new delegation agreements.

The Medical Commission opened investigations on all medical doctors and physician assistants practicing at the Seattle Pain Centers based on concerns of poor practice standards in place throughout the Seattle Pain Center organization. The Commission authorized filing of complaints on all advance registered nurse practitioners and doctors of osteopathy practicing at the Seattle Pain Centers. These complaints will be managed by each oversight body according to standard protocol and law.

Dr. Li has an active "core provider" agreement in Washington to see Apple Health (Medicaid) patients. Washington's Health Care Authority (HCA) expects to terminate his core provider agreement after the Medical Commission's action suspending his license. This means that other providers in his clinics will not be able to bill for Apple Health (Medicaid) services provided in his clinics. They can reapply for participation, but will not be able to bill for services unless a new application is accepted.

This action may limit patients' access to care. The Department of Health urges patients of the Seattle Pain Centers to contact their health insurance company and primary care provider as soon as possible to try to minimize disruptions in their care. The Medical Commission has additional [information for patients](#) of Seattle Pain Centers.

Media Availability

Time: 11 a.m. – 1 p.m., Friday, July 15, 2016

Location: 101 Israel Rd SE, Tumwater, WA 98501, Washington State Department of Health,

To schedule an interview contact: Julie Graham, Strategic Communications; 360-810-1628

The documents in this case can be seen online by clicking "[Look up a health care provider](#)" on the [Department of Health website](#). Copies can be requested by calling 360-236-4700. That number can also be used to file complaints against health care providers in Washington

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The Medical Commission promotes patient safety and enhances the integrity of the profession through licensing, rule-making, discipline, and education. Learn more about the commission: www.doh.wa.gov/medical. Follow the Medical Commission on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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Medical Commission Discipline Process

This flowchart displays the complaint process and the estimated timeframes. The reconsideration request and judicial review process timeframes refer to the length of time determined by statute for the complainant or respondent to complete the necessary steps for those actions. The Commission determines the length of compliance monitoring on a case-by-case basis. We encourage you to read the [Practitioner Regulation](#) section of the website for complete details.

Intake and Assessment: 21 Days **Investigation: 170 Days** **Case Disposition: 140 Days**
Request Reconsideration: 30 Days **Reconsideration Petition: 10 Days** **Judicial Review: 30 Days**

