

# What Your Patients Need to Know About NSAIDs—A Case Study

When Prescribing NSAIDs...



USE THE  
LOWEST  
EFFECTIVE  
DOSE



FOR THE  
SHORTEST  
PERIOD OF  
TIME



Not an actual patient

## Holly H.

Holly H. a 34-year-old woman with psoriatic arthritis, presents for a follow-up appointment with her primary care physician, to whom she reports ongoing pain. She was prescribed a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) by her rheumatologist, but admits to being noncompliant with her medication because of her fear of NSAID-induced gastrointestinal (GI) complications. She has an aunt with rheumatoid arthritis who suffered a GI bleed related to prescription NSAID use. Because of the experience of her family member, this patient believes that the risks of NSAID use outweigh the benefits.

### Clinical Issues

- Undertreated chronic pain and inflammation
- Medication noncompliance
- Concerns about NSAID-related side effects

### Case Commentary

Concern about the adverse events associated with prescribed therapies is an important communication issue between patients and providers. Additionally, it is not uncommon for patients to project one clinical outcome (her aunt's GI bleed) onto a different clinical context (her risk profile). In this case, Holly H. failed to realize that by not taking her prescribed NSAID therapy she was inadequately managing her condition, which increased her risk of undertreated chronic pain and inflammation, potentially leading to diminished quality of life, loss of functionality, and worsening of her condition. Holly H.'s decision to be noncompliant with her prescribed therapy—a choice driven by lack of knowledge and communication—impacted her health and well-being.



Alliance for Rational  
Use of NSAIDs

A Public Health Coalition

## What Holly H. Should Know

NSAIDs are generally safe and well tolerated when used appropriately and are effective in reducing the pain and inflammation associated with many chronic conditions, such as Holly H.'s psoriatic arthritis. As are all medications, NSAIDs are associated with certain complications, primarily GI, cardiovascular, and renal toxicities.<sup>1,2</sup> Although these complications can be severe, their risk can be minimized with appropriate use. To reduce the risk for complications, guidelines for NSAID use recommend using the lowest effective dose for the shortest time required to achieve a desired therapeutic effect.<sup>3-7</sup> These recommendations are based on evidence that the risk of complications associated with NSAID use increases with higher NSAID dose and longer duration of use.

- Compared with low-dose NSAID use, high-dose NSAID use:
  - Increased the risk of upper GI complications by **70% to 230%**,<sup>8\*†</sup> and the risk of upper GI bleeding by approximately 3- to 6-fold<sup>9\*†</sup>
  - Increased the risk of acute renal failure by **50% to 240%**<sup>10,11\*</sup>
  - Increased the risk of myocardial infarction by **28%**<sup>12</sup>

Current guidelines also recommend that gastroprotective agents, such as prostaglandin analogues (misoprostol), proton pump inhibitors, and double doses of histamine type-2 receptor antagonists, be used concomitantly with NSAIDs to help prevent GI complications in patients at risk for GI toxicity.<sup>13-16</sup>

**Visit [www.NSAIDAlliance.com](http://www.NSAIDAlliance.com) to take an interactive survey about NSAID risks and learn more about the Alliance for Rational Use of NSAIDs.**

\*Relative risk or odds ratio varied depending on the NSAID used.  
†NSAIDs used in these studies were not accompanied by gastroprotection.

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## Practical Considerations

Pain management is an important part of treating many chronic conditions and an individual's treatment goals must be considered when prescribing NSAIDs. Just as patients have the right and obligation to understand the risks and benefits of any prescribed medication, it is important to counsel patients with chronic painful conditions about the consequences of undertreatment and how appropriate NSAID use can help them safely manage their condition.

In situations where medication noncompliance is an issue, communication between patients and their health care professional is essential to ensuring mutual understanding and agreement about treatment goals and approaches and identifying impediments to therapeutic success. In addition, improved education about how to minimize the risks associated with NSAIDs, identifying and allaying fears, improving treatment compliance, and mitigating NSAID risks will help patients feel more comfortable and ensure safe and appropriate use.

The Alliance for Rational Use of NSAIDs—a public health coalition—aims to bridge the gap between guidance and clinical practice, educating health care professionals and the public at-large to ensure safe and appropriate use of NSAIDs.

