

Screening and Opioid Assessment for Patients with Pain—Revised (SOAPP®-R)

ABOUT THE SOAPP®-R

The **Screening and Opioid Assessment for Patients with Pain—Revised (SOAPP®-R)** is a tool for clinicians to help determine how much monitoring a patient on long-term opioid therapy might require. This is an updated and revised version of SOAPP V.1 released in 2003.

Physicians remain reluctant to prescribe opioid medication because of concerns about addiction, misuse, and other aberrant medication-related behaviors, as well as liability and censure concerns. Despite recent findings suggesting that most patients are able to successfully remain on long-term opioid therapy without significant problems, physicians often express a lack of confidence in their ability to distinguish patients likely to have few problems on long-term opioid therapy from those requiring more monitoring.

The SOAPP®-R is a quick and easy-to-use questionnaire designed to help providers evaluate the patients' relative risk for developing problems when placed on long-term opioid therapy. The SOAPP®-R is:

- **A brief paper and pencil questionnaire;** 24 items and <10 minutes to complete
- **Simple to score** (see below)
- **Developed based on expert consensus** regarding important concepts likely to predict which patients will require more or less monitoring on long-term opioid therapy (content and face valid)
- **Validated** with 500 chronic pain patients
- **Ideal for documenting decisions** about the level of monitoring planned for a particular patient or justifying referrals to specialty pain clinic.
- **For clinician use only.** The tool is not meant for commercial distribution.
- **NOT a lie detector.** Patients determined to misrepresent themselves will still do so. Other clinical information should be used with SOAPP®-R scores to decide on a particular patient's treatment.
- **NOT intended for all patients.** The SOAPP®-R should be completed by chronic pain patients being considered for opioid therapy.



Note: It is important to remember that all chronic pain patients deserve treatment of their pain. Providers not comfortable treating certain patients should refer those patients to a specialist.

SCORING THE SOAPP®-R

All 24 questions contained in the SOAPP®-R have been empirically identified as predicting aberrant medication-related behavior six months after initial testing. **To score the assessment, add the ratings of all the questions.** A score of 18 or higher is considered positive.

Sum of Questions	SOAPP®-R Indication
18 or over	Positive
Below 18	Negative

About the SOAPP®-R Cutoff Score

For any screening test, the results depend on the cutoff score that is chosen. A score that is good at detecting patients at risk will necessarily include a number of patients who are not really at risk. A score that is good at identifying those at low risk will, in turn, miss a number of patients at risk. A screening measure like the SOAPP®-R generally endeavors to minimize the chances of missing high-risk patients. This means that patients who are truly at low risk may still get a score above the cutoff.

See page 4 for a table that presents statistics describing the sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value, positive likelihood ratio, and negative likelihood ratio of the SOAPP®-R at different cutoff values. These values suggest that the SOAPP®-R is a sensitive test. This confirms that the SOAPP®-R is better at identifying who is at high risk than identifying who is at low risk.

Using a cutoff score of 18 will ensure that the provider is least likely to miss someone who is really at high risk. However, one should remember that a low SOAPP®-R score suggests the patient is very likely at low-risk, while a high SOAPP®-R score will contain a larger percentage of false positives (about 30%); at the same time retaining a large percentage of true positives. This could be improved, so that a positive score has a lower false positive rate, but only at the risk of missing more of those who actually do show aberrant behavior.

HOW DOES THE SOAPP®-R HELP DETERMINE APPROPRIATE TREATMENT?

The SOAPP®-R should only be one step in the assessment process to determine which patients are high-risk for opioid misuse. The following discussion examines the assessment and treatment options for chronic pain patients who are at risk (high risk or medium risk) and those who are likely not at risk.

Who is at a HIGH risk for opioid misuse? (Score = 22 or greater*)

Patients in this category are judged to be at a high risk for opioid misuse. These patients have indicated a history of behaviors or beliefs that are thought to place them at a higher risk for opioid misuse. Some examples of these behaviors or beliefs include a current or recent history of alcohol or drug abuse, being discharged from another physician's care because of his/her behavior, and regular noncompliance with physicians' orders. These patients may have misused other prescription medications in the past. It is a good idea to review the SOAPP®-R questions with the patient, especially those items the patient endorsed. This will help flesh out the clinical picture, so the provider can be in the best position to design an effective, workable treatment plan.

Careful and thoughtful planning will be necessary for patients in this category. Some patients in this category are probably best suited for other therapies or need to exhaust other interventions prior to entering a treatment plan that includes chronic opioid therapy. Others may need to have psychological or psychiatric treatment prior to or concomitant with any treatment involving opioids. Patients in this category who receive opioid therapy should be required to follow a strict protocol, such as regular urine drug screens, opioid compliance checklists, and counseling.

Specific treatment considerations for patients in this high-risk category:

- Past medical records should be obtained and contact with previous and current providers should be maintained.
- Patients should also be told that they would be expected to initially give a urine sample for a toxicology screen during every clinic visit. They should also initially be given medication for limited periods of time (e.g., every 2-weeks).
- Ideally, family members should be interviewed and involvement with an addiction medicine specialist and/or mental health professional should be sought.
- Less abusable formulations should be considered (e.g., long-acting versus short-acting opioids, transdermal versus oral preparation, tamper-resistant medications).
- Early signs of aberrant behavior and a violation of the opioid agreement should result in a change in treatment plan. Depending on the degree of violation, one might consider more restricted monitoring, or, if resources are limited, referring the patient to a program where opioids can be prescribed under stricter conditions. If violations or aberrant behaviors persist, it may be necessary to discontinue opioid therapy.

***Note:** The scores described in this section to represent high risk, moderate risk, and low risk are general ranges. Clinicians should also complement SOAPP®-R scores with other clinical data such as urine screens and psychological evaluations.

Who is at a MODERATE risk for opioid misuse? (Score = 10 to 21*)

Patients in this category are judged to be at a medium or moderate risk for opioid misuse. These patients have indicated a history of behaviors or beliefs that are thought to place them at some risk for misuse. Some examples of these behaviors or beliefs are family history of drug abuse, history of psychological issues such as depression or anxiety, a strong belief that medications are the only treatments that will reduce pain and a history of noncompliance with other prescription medications.

It is a good idea to review the SOAPP®-R items the patient endorsed with the patient present. Some of these patients are probably best treated by concomitant psychological interventions in which they can learn to increase their pain-coping skills, decrease depression and anxiety, and have more frequent monitoring of their compliance. They may need to be closely monitored until proven reliable by not running out of their medications early and having appropriate urine drug screens.

Additional treatment considerations for patients in this moderate-risk category:

- Periodic urine screens are recommended.
- After a period in which no signs of aberrant behavior are observed, less frequent clinic visits may be indicated. If there are any violations of the opioid agreement, then regular urine screens and frequent clinic visits would be recommended.
- After two or more violations of the opioid agreement, an assessment by an addiction medicine specialist and/or mental health professional should be mandated.
- After repeat violations referral to a substance abuse program would be recommended. A recurrent history of violations would also be grounds for tapering and discontinuing opioid therapy.

Who is at a LOW risk for opioid misuse? (Score < 9*)

Patients in this category are judged to be at a low risk for opioid misuse. These patients have likely tried and been compliant with many other types of therapies. They should be able to handle their medication safely with minimal monitoring. They are apt to be responsible in their use of alcohol, not smoke cigarettes, and have no history of previous difficulties with alcohol, prescription drugs, or illegal substances. This patient probably reports few symptoms of affective distress, such as depression or anxiety.

As noted previously, the SOAPP®-R is not a lie detector. The provider should be alert to inconsistencies in the patient report or a collateral report. Any sense that the patient's story "doesn't add up" should lead the provider to take a more cautious approach until experience suggests that the person is reliable.

Patients in this category would be likely to have no violations of the opioid treatment agreement. These patients are least likely to develop a substance abuse disorder. Additionally, they may not require special monitoring or concomitant psychological treatment.

Additional treatment considerations for patients in this category:

- Review of SOAPP®-R questions is not necessary, unless the provider is aware of inconsistencies or other anomaly in patient history/report.
- Frequent urine screens are not indicated.
- Less worry is needed about the type of opioid to be prescribed and the frequency of clinic visits.
- Efficacy of opioid therapy should be re-assessed every six months, and urine toxicology screens and update of the opioid therapy agreement would be recommended annually.

***Note:** The scores described in this section to represent high risk, moderate risk, and low risk are general ranges. Clinicians should also complement SOAPP®-R scores with other clinical data such as urine screens and psychological evaluations.

SENSITIVITY AND SPECIFICITY OF THE SOAPP®-R

The table below presents several statistics that describe how effective the SOAPP®-R is at different cutoff values.

Cutoff Score	Sensitivity	Specificity	Positive Predictive Value	Negative Predictive Value	Positive Likelihood Ratio	Negative Likelihood Ratio
17 or above	.83	.65	.56	.88	2.38	.26
18 or above	.81	.68	.57	.87	3.80	.29
19 or above	.77	.75	.62	.86	3.03	.31

Clinically, a score of 18 or higher will identify 81% of those who actually turn out to be high risk. The Negative Predictive Values for a cutoff score of 18 is .87, which means that most people who have a negative SOAPP®-R are likely at low risk. Finally, the Positive Likelihood Ratio suggests that a positive SOAPP®-R score (at a cutoff of 18) is nearly 4 times (3.80 times) as likely to come from someone who is actually at high risk (note that, of these statistics, the likelihood ratio is least affected by prevalence rates).