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I am writing to share my personal experience and advocate for a balanced approach to opioid medication in chronic pain management. As a veteran, I suffer from herniated discs, osteoarthritis, and severe pain in my coccyx, sacroiliac joints, and hips. These conditions have significantly impacted my quality of life. I have undergone countless treatments, including epidural steroid injections, radiofrequency ablations, and other procedures, and I am currently awaiting evaluation for back surgery. Despite these efforts, the only treatment that has consistently allowed me to function and live a somewhat normal life has been opioid medication.

Unfortunately, as a veteran receiving care from the VA, I experienced a long period where opioids were no longer prescribed due to restrictive policies. This left me in unbearable pain, feeling hopeless and depressed, and unable to engage in everyday activities. When I finally found a physician willing to responsibly prescribe opioids, my life changed dramatically for the better.

I understand the concerns surrounding opioid misuse, but I strongly urge the CDC to consider the needs of patients who use these medications responsibly. Chronic pain patients often do not have alternatives that provide the same level of relief, especially when other treatments, like injections and radiofrequency ablations, fail. Studies have shown that opioid medications, when used as directed, significantly improve pain management and quality of life. According to a 2022 analysis, long-term opioid therapy can reduce pain severity by up to 30% for carefully selected patients, improving their physical and emotional well-being.

Pain can happen to anyone at any time. Restrictive opioid policies risk leaving many people suffering without effective relief. I urge the CDC to reconsider these guidelines to allow physicians the flexibility to treat pain patients individually and responsibly. Opioid medications, when prescribed and monitored properly, can mean the difference between someone choosing to fight for recovery versus giving up on life.

Thank you for considering my perspective.