

Health Watch

Opioids and Dentistry

Opioid pain relievers are commonly prescribed following surgery, injury, or for health conditions such as cancer. They may also be prescribed for moderate to severe acute dental pain.¹ While opioids can be effective for managing chronic pain and other conditions when properly administered, they carry significant risk when misused or abused.

Regular monitoring and identification of early risk factors is critical to recognizing patients who may be at-risk for prescription drug abuse and those who may need treatment. Commitment across the healthcare industry is critical to effectively fight prescription opioid abuse.

What dentists can do:

As dentists, you have a significant role in ensuring appropriate prescription opioid use. To understand your role, you should be familiar with these two statements from the American Dental Association addressing opioid prescribing:

1. Statement on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain.²
2. Statement on Provision of Dental Treatment for Patients with Substance Use Disorders.³

These statements outline opioid management considerations including the importance of:

- Registering with and utilizing prescription drug monitoring program.
- Discussing with patients their responsibilities for preventing misuse, abuse, storage, and disposal of prescription opioids.
- Using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory analgesics as the first-line therapy for acute pain management.
- Coordinating with other treating doctors, including pain specialists when prescribing opioids for management of chronic orofacial pain.
- Consulting with the patient's physician when the patient has a history of alcoholism or other substance use disorder.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) are among the most promising interventions to improve opioid prescribing, inform clinical practice, and protect patients at risk.⁴ What you need to know:

- Enroll in your local PDMP.
- The PDMP allows you to identify situations in which you should not be prescribing a controlled substance to a patient. This enables you to move toward better medication adherence and helps to curb the prescription drug abuse epidemic.

¹ American Dental Association. Oral Analgesics for Acute Dental Pain. Available at: <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/oral-analgesics-for-acute-dental-pain> (Accessed May 2023).

² American Dental Association. Statement on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain. Available at: <https://www.ada.org/about/governance/current-policies> (Accessed May 2023).

³ American Dental Association. Statement on Provision of Dental Treatment for Patients with Substance Use Disorders. Available at: <https://www.ada.org/about/governance/current-policies#substanceusedisorders> (Accessed May 2023).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs): What Clinicians Need to Know. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/healthcare-professionals/pdmps.html> (Accessed May 2023).