February 24, 2016

Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC  20510

Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC  20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

On behalf of our 158,000 members, we are writing to urge you to bring several provisions of S. 524, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2015, to the floor for a vote by the full Senate. The provisions in this bill would complement our ongoing efforts to keep prescription opioid pain medications from becoming a source of harm in our communities.

Opioid pain medications, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, have become a leading source of drug abuse among teens and young adults. As prescribers of these painkilling medications, dentists have a role to play in preventing their diversion, misuse, and abuse.

**Pain Management Practices Inter-Agency Task Force**

If enacted, Sec. 101 would establish a federal task force to develop best practices for pain management and prescribing pain medication, and a strategy for disseminating such best practices. A dental perspective will help clarify the differences between pain management in dentistry and pain management in medicine.

**Prescription Drug Take-Back Programs**

Sec. 203 would provide funds to expand the use of disposal sites for unused prescription medications. Many parents are unaware their teenagers may be obtaining discarded prescription medicine from the trash.

The ADA has been a proponent of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s National Prescription Drug Take-Back campaign since 2012. The campaign is a way for our members to identify their community’s prescription drug disposal sites and how to counsel patients about the need to dispose of prescription medications responsibly.

**Recovery Community Partnerships**

Sec. 304 authorizes grants to help the recovery community develop, expand, and enhance recovery support services in their communities. It will encourage recovery community organizations and state substance abuse authorities to develop connections with health care professionals, including state and local dental societies. These relationships will bolster the profession’s peer assistance programs, which are a pathway to recovery for dentists who may be addicted to alcohol and/or drugs.

For twenty years, the ADA has helped state dental societies develop formal peer assistance programs to get dentists into treatment before they have an alcohol- or drug-related incident. These programs leverage the confidentiality, trust, and understanding of a tightly knit profession to support dentists throughout their recovery, and help them establish some measure of long-term stability in their lives.
We have proudly supported the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Recovery Month since 2004. The campaign is a way for our members to identify their community’s substance abuse treatment resources and learn how to make referrals when indicated. It is also a way to help dentists in recovery live longer, happier, and healthier lives.

**Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs**

Sec. 601 would provide funds to improve the design and operation of prescription drug monitoring programs, increase the number of prescribers registered with those programs, and increase the number of health professionals who complete training in model opioid prescribing practices.

This provision complements our work with the American Medical Association Task Force to Reduce Opioid Abuse, a coalition of health professional organizations whose mission is to reverse the nation’s opioid epidemic. The coalition’s initial goal is to improve the design and operation of prescription drug monitoring programs.

S. 524 is an important step towards curbing the rates of addiction, overdoses, and deaths associated with prescription opioid abuse. We urge you to bring this bill to the Senate floor for a vote with these provisions intact.

We applaud Sens. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rob Portman for introducing this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Mindi Walker at 202-898-2404 or walkerm@ada.org. Information is also available at ADA.org/opioids.

Sincerely,

/s/ Carol Gomez Summerhays, D.D.S.  
President

/s/ Kathleen T. O’Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.  
Executive Director

CGS:KTO:rjb