

May 12, 2016

Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
711 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-1304

Dear Senator Durbin:

On behalf of the American Dental Association (ADA) and our 159,000 members, we are pleased to respond to your letter of May 11, regarding our longstanding efforts to keep prescription opioid pain medications from becoming a source of harm in our communities.

Opioid pain medications—such as hydrocodone (Vicodin®) and oxycodone (OxyContin® and Percocet®)—have become a leading source of drug abuse among teens and young adults. As prescribers of these pain medications, dentists certainly have a role to play in preventing their abuse, misuse, and diversion.

We disagree with your assertion that the ADA and its members have failed to “take responsibility for its role contributing to the opioid and heroin epidemic,” and that dentists are taking advantage of “perceived financial incentives to over-treat pain.” In fact, the ADA has been actively engaged in trying to address opioid abuse for many years.

Enclosed you will find a summary of what the ADA has been doing to help keep opioid pain medications from becoming a source of harm in our communities. Please note that in 2010, dentists were the third most frequent prescribers of opioid pain medications.<sup>1</sup> By 2012, dentists had fallen to fifth— behind family practitioners, internists, general practitioners, and surgeons.<sup>2</sup> This is a testament to what dentistry has been doing to address this issue.

We can all do more to keep prescription pain medications from becoming a source of harm in our communities. For our part, the ADA will continue raising professional awareness about prescription opioid abuse, encouraging dentists to complete CERP-recognized<sup>3</sup> training in model opioid prescribing, and urging every dentist to register with his or her state prescription drug monitoring program.

We applaud you for joining the fight to address this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Mary Dietrich at 202-789-5178 or [dietrichm@ada.org](mailto:dietrichm@ada.org). Information is also available at [ADA.org/opioids](http://ADA.org/opioids).

Sincerely,

/s/

Carol Gomez Summerhays, D.D.S.  
President

CGS:KTO:rjb  
Enclosure

/s/

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

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<sup>1</sup> SDI: Vector One® National, Total number of prescriptions dispensed in the U.S. by top 10 prescribing specialties for immediate-release opioids, Year 2009, Extracted June 2010.

<sup>2</sup> IMS Health, National Prescription Audit, United States, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The ADA Continuing Education Recognition Program (ADA CERP) provides ADA members and the dental community a mechanism to select quality continuing dental education courses with confidence that the credits awarded will be recognized for state licensure renewal.

## **Activities to Enlist Dentists to Address Opioid Misuse, Abuse, and Diversion**

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Ever since the *Journal of the American Dental Association* published a cover story in 2011 about the dentist's role in preventing prescription opioid abuse, the ADA has worked on the issue, beginning in earnest that same year when approached by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Since that time, the Association has taken a number of steps to ensure that its members are aware of the potential for opioid addiction and that they have the tools to prevent it.

- **Continuing education.** For years, the ADA has offered in-person and online continuing education courses on using opioids to manage dental pain in the context of modern drug-seeking behavior. Since at least 2012, there been increasing demand for such training.

Every dentist that attended the Association's 2015 Conference on Dentist Health and Wellness completed a continuing education course on opioid prescribing. And the opioid prescribing courses offered the Association's 2015 annual dental meeting completely sold out.

Thanks, in part, to a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the ADA has been offering free continuing education webinars covering the latest techniques for recognizing when a when a patient may be seeking opioids for non-medical purposes, and how to briefly counsel and refer those patients for appropriate substance abuse treatment. The webinars are available to members and non-members alike.

The webinars are attractive to dentists because they are free, easy to access, and distinguish pain management in medicine from pain management in dentistry. Above all, they are recognized by the ADA Continuing Education Recognition Program (ADA CERP). State dental boards typically accept CERP-recognized course credits for licensure renewal.

The ADA is finalizing the content for its next round of online courses, which are planned for August and September.

- **Professional Guidelines.** In May 2015, the ADA published an easy-to-use reference manual, "Practical Guide to Substance Use Disorders and Safe Prescribing," which includes techniques dentists can use to identify and respond to suspicious drug-seeking behaviors, including after-hours requests for prescription drugs.

In addition, the Association is updating its *Guideline on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain*. The guideline will help dentists establish a more appropriate balance between the need to use opioids for effective pain management and their abuse potential. It will also help dental schools develop curriculum for drug abuse prevention,

and help state dental societies and state boards of dentistry as they establish position papers.

- **AMA Task Force to Reduce Opioid Abuse.** The ADA joined the American Medical Association Task Force to Reduce Opioid Abuse last year. The mission of this coalition of health professional organizations is 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.
- **Medicine Abuse Project.** The ADA has been a member of the Medicine Abuse Project since 2012. This initiative of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America raises awareness of prescription drug abuse and enlists dentists in the fight against it.
- **National Prescription Drug Take-Back Initiative.** The ADA began promoting the Drug Enforcement Administration's National Prescription Drug Take-Back Initiative in 2012. The Association has used the campaign to remind dentists to counsel patients on how to safely secure and dispose of unused medications at home, and encourage patients to attend local Take-Back events.
- **National Recovery Month.** The ADA has been a proponent of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Recovery Month since 2004. The ADA uses the campaign to help its members to identify their community's substance abuse treatment resources and learn how to make referrals when indicated.
- **White House Partnership to Address Prescription Drug Abuse.** The ADA last year entered a strategic partnership with the White House to help prevent opioid drug-related overdoses and deaths. The Association pledged to seek an increase to the number of dentists completing its CERP-recognized continuing education webinars on responsible opioid prescribing. The ADA also pledged to seek an increase in the number of dentists who are registered with their state's prescription drug monitoring program (where available).

The ADA has been leveraging these and other programs to raise professional awareness about prescription opioid abuse, encourage dentists to complete CERP-recognized training in model opioid prescribing, and urge every dentist to register with his or her state prescription drug monitoring program.

Find out more at [ADA.org/opioids](http://ADA.org/opioids).