



Dentists' Use, Misuse, Abuse or Dependence on Mood-Altering Substances

Dentists are not immune from alcohol and drug abuse and the development of addiction.

In fact, such dangers might be considered occupational hazards.

Health-care professionals, including dentists, physicians, nurses, and pharmacists are frequently exposed to periods of high stress. They are prone to perfectionism, and unrealistic expectations about themselves.

Importantly, they have knowledge of and access to drugs of potential abuse.

When faced with an unexpected or disappointing treatment outcome, the health-care professional's sense of invulnerability may be replaced with feelings of inadequacy and failure, feelings that he/she might attempt to numb with alcohol and drugs. Over time, this may lead to abuse and addiction.

However, unlike other health-care professionals, most dentists engage in solo private practices, largely isolated from their peers. Even in large group clinics, the number of dentists practising in partnership or association is comparatively small. This style of practice may facilitate access to drugs of potential abuse and make detection more difficult.

What begins innocently as the occasional use of alcohol and/or drugs to relieve stress and cope with problems, left undetected may develop into a self-destructive habit of impairment, resulting in significant consequences to the dentist, patients, co-workers, and loved ones.

With these sobering thoughts, the advisory board to PEAK offers the following article on this important topic: Dentists' Use, Misuse, Abuse or Dependence on Mood-Altering Substances from the April 2004 issue of the *New York State Dental Journal*.

Remember: If help is needed, it is just a phone call away, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, toll-free at 1-800-268-5211.

This article examines the development and detection of alcohol and drug addiction and offers real hope for members overcoming this illness through support by professional assistance programs.

In Ontario, any dentist can access the Member Assistance Program (MAP) offered by the Ontario Dental Association's Dentists At Risk (DAR) through the Canadian Dental Service Plans Inc. The College is pleased to lend its support to this successful ODA program. MAP provides short-term counselling, consulting, and referrals at no cost to dentists, their families, and dental office staff. The service is absolutely free and confidential. Help is a phone call away, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The rate of recovery is excellent for health-care professionals who receive

treatment for addictive illness and maintain participation in ongoing support programs.

Dentists, like other health-care professionals, are a vital resource for the public. Their training represents a considerable investment of both public and private funds, often requiring a substantial personal sacrifice on the part of the student dentist. The retention of such highly-trained individuals is in the best interest of the public.

PEAK (Practice Enhancement and Knowledge) is a College service for members, with the goal of regularly providing Ontario dentists with copies of key articles on a wide range of clinical and non-clinical topics from dental literature around the world.

It is important to note that PEAK articles may contain opinions, views or statements that are not necessarily endorsed by the College. However, the PEAK advisory board is committed in its desire to provide quality material to enhance the knowledge and skills of member dentists.

If you have any suggestions for subjects to be addressed by PEAK or questions about this membership service, please contact:

Dr. Michael Gardner

Assistant to the Registrar, Dental
phone: 416-934-5616
toll free: 1-800-565-4591
e-mail: mgardner@rcdso.org