

# Prevention of prescription opioid abuse

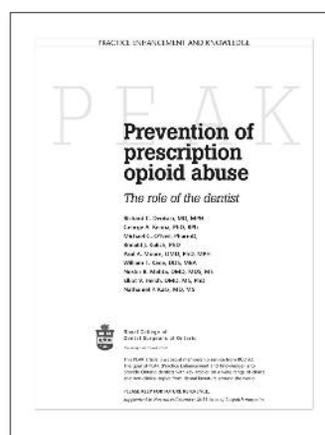
PEAK (Practice Enhancement and Knowledge) is a College service for members, whose goal is to regularly provide Ontario dentists with copies of key articles on a wide range of clinical and non-clinical topics from the dental literature around the world.

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

Dentists face difficult challenges in helping their patients manage oral-facial pain while ensuring that, if opioids are indicated, their use does not contribute to the province's opioid abuse problem.

The problem in Ontario is indeed serious. This province is at the top of the list for Canada in narcotic use per capita. Many other indicators paint a fairly grim picture of the excessive use of prescription narcotics and controlled substances. For example, since 2000, the Coroner's Office has reported a fivefold increase in oxycodone-related deaths and a 41 per cent increase in overall narcotic-related mortality following the addition of long-acting oxycodone to the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary.

Prescription narcotics have also become a highly lucrative street commodity resulting in widespread diversion and trafficking by both individuals and organized crime groups. Between 2005 and 2008, prescription drug arrests and charges in Ontario increased by 99 per cent and 197 per cent respectively.



Research from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto in 2009 and published in the January 2009 issue of Canadian Family Physician found that over a five-year period, of the people coming to CAMH’s medical withdrawal service for the treatment of opioid dependence, those having a problem with OxyContin® increased steadily from fewer than four per cent to 55 per cent.

These are all very troubling indicators. No wonder that in May 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care introduced a provincial strategy to improve the province’s ability to identify and reduce abuse, addiction and diversion of narcotics and other controlled substances while ensuring their appropriate use for legitimate medical and dental purposes

Then, at the end of November 2010, the Ontario Narcotics Safety and Awareness Act was proclaimed. One of the purposes of this legislation is to provide a way for the monitoring of prescribing and dispensing of certain controlled substances.

Ontario subsequently launched a further five-point strategy to address abuse of prescription narcotics and other

controlled substances and to ensure their safe and appropriate use by those who require pain management medication.

This strategy has five key elements:

- narcotics tracking system
- partnering with the health care sector to educate on appropriate prescribing
- partnering with the health care sector to educate on appropriate dispensing
- education in order to prevent excess use of prescription narcotics
- addiction treatment

As a follow-up to the introduction of the above legislation and strategy, RCDSO held a Symposium on the Management of Pain in Dental Practice in November 2010. An article about the symposium was published in the August/September 2011 issue of Dispatch and the Symposium’s final report is posted on our website at [www.rcdso.org](http://www.rcdso.org) under Publications/General Publications.

One of the recommendations from the College’s symposium dealt with the education of Ontario dentists on this important subject. So, with this current issue of Dispatch, PEAK is pleased to offer members an article that first appeared in the July 2011 issue of the Journal of the American Dental

Association entitled “Prevention of prescription opioid abuse.”

This article summarizes a March 2010 two-day meeting at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston, designed to synthesize available opioid abuse literature and data and to highlight practices that dentists can implement to minimize opioid abuse through:

- patient education;
- careful patient assessment;
- referral for substance abuse treatment when indicated.

The paper identifies the need for further research, presents a suggested research agenda on the subject and also offers some considerations to make when prescribing opioids to dental patients.

Here in Ontario, another outcome from the College’s symposium last year was the formation of a Working Group for Management of Pain in Dental Practice which will be considering, among other issues, the education of dental students, practitioners and patients on this important issue. This working group will be reporting back to Council in 2012.

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