

Increased utilization of prescription opioids for pain management has contributed to their abuse leading to a national public health crisis.¹ In 2009, dentists were the leading source of opioid prescriptions for children and adolescents while ranking among the top five prescribers for all age groups.² Furthermore, a recent study indicated that opioid-naïve patients who received an opioid prescription from a dental clinician may be at risk for persistent opioid use and abuse.¹

Recognizing this national crisis, leaderships of Park Dental and The Dental Specialists along with our 132 general dentists and 26 specialty dentists, undertook proactive efforts to counteract it. Aligning with our commitment to improve peoples' lives as leaders in oral health, we made it a priority to reduce the burden of the opioid epidemic. In 2017, a joint task force was formed with the goal of reducing the number of opioid prescriptions within both organizations. The following measures were implemented:

A. Education and Training

- a. **Provider Education:** Dentists were educated regarding the impact of the opioid crisis; their role in this crisis; and reviewing opioid alternatives. This was achieved through in-person/online CE seminars and by dissemination of educational materials such as newsletters, scientific articles, and related publications by reputed organizations.
- b. **Patient education:** An opioid Patient Agreement is currently under development and will be utilized by providers to educate patients regarding risks associated with opioid therapy, and about proper safekeeping and disposal of unused medications. A copy will be provided to every patient receiving opioid prescriptions.

B. Acute Post-Operative Pain, Opioid Prescribing Guidelines:

In 2018, we adopted the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry's Safe Prescribing Guidelines. These were communicated to all providers and also included in the Clinical Care Protocol Manual.

C. Ongoing Monitoring and Research

- a. **Opioid prescription record review:** In 2017, existing opioid prescription records were reviewed to establish baseline data surmising that provision of this information to providers would result in decreased prescription rates.
- b. **Ongoing internal reporting:** We plan to generate biannual opioid prescription reports per provider. These will help determine current levels/trends in providers' prescribing practices and help identify areas for improvement.
- c. **With the aim of creating evidence-based guidelines for acute dental pain management, we are planning to map the evidence regarding interventions for acute dental pain and conduct a network meta-analysis to compare interventions and rank them by efficacy levels.**

In 2018, as a result of some of the above-mentioned initiatives, Park Dental and The Dental Specialists were able to reduce the number of opioid prescriptions by 48 percent and 38 percent, respectively. As Henry Ford rightly stated, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success", we are joining the Action Collaborative on Countering the U.S. Opioid Epidemic to work closely with other organizations having the same goal.

¹Schroeder AR, Dehghan M, Newman TB, Bentley JP, Park KT. Association of opioid prescriptions from dental clinicians for us adolescents and young adults with subsequent opioid use and abuse. J Am Med Assoc Intern Med. 2019;179(2):145-52.

²Volkow ND, McLellan TA, Cotto JH, Karithanom M, Weiss SRB. Characteristics of opioid prescriptions in 2009. J Am Med Assoc. 2011;305(13):1299-301.