

February 28, 2019

Statement on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain

AmeriHealth Caritas District of Columbia Dental Providers:

As we continue to monitor the current trends of the profession, we feel that it is appropriate to present various topics to ensure that we are providing the best service for our members possible. The rising epidemic of opiate addiction and abuse is one of those topics in which dental providers play some part. Dentists have been found to be the second highest prescribers of opioids. We want to provide this statement as a guide for consideration in the treatment of your patient and our members as cautious providers. Thank you for your attention and continued assistance to serve this community on behalf of AmeriHealth Caritas District of Columbia.

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Dental Director

When considering prescribing opioids, dentists should conduct a medical and dental history to determine current medications, potential drug interactions and history of substance abuse. Dentists should follow and continually review Centers for Disease Control recommendations. All first-time opioid prescriptions for children age 19 and under are now capped at three days and fewer than 50 morphine milligram equivalents per day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

According to the CDC: "Long-term opioid use often begins with treatment of acute pain. When opioids are used for acute pain, clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dose of immediate-release opioids and should prescribe no greater quantity than needed for the expected duration of pain severe enough to require opioids. Three days or less will often be sufficient; more than seven days will rarely be needed."

An [overview of systematic reviews](#) published in the April 2018 edition of the Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA) found that combinations of ibuprofen and acetaminophen were more effective at relieving acute dental pain with fewer acute adverse events. The authors concluded that the use of non-steroidal medications (NSAIDs), with or without acetaminophen, offered the most favorable balance between benefits and harms, optimizing efficacy while minimizing acute adverse events.

The ADA recommends that dentists consider non-steroidal anti-inflammatory analgesics as the first-line therapy for acute pain management as well as premedication of NSAIDs before procedures for those who can tolerate them.

For more information visit: <https://www.ada.org/en/advocacy/advocacy-issues/opioid-crisis/faqs-on-opioid-prescribing>