



# The Role of Dentists in Managing Opioids

How the dental community  
and UnitedHealthcare have the  
opportunity to work together to  
address the opioid epidemic.

# The United States is facing an opioid epidemic.

To help address the epidemic, UnitedHealthcare is working closely with health care stakeholders, including the more than 100,000 dentists in our dental care provider network, to more clearly understand the extent of the problem and collaborate to develop solutions.

## How dentists have an opportunity to help.

UnitedHealthcare encourages dentists to become familiar with, and implement in their practices, current guidelines from the American Dental Association (ADA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other health organizations.<sup>4,5,6</sup>



### It is important for dentists to:

- ✓ Look for opportunities to prescribe alternative medications.
- ✓ If opioids are necessary, write prescriptions for the minimum appropriate dosage and number of days.
- ✓ Have candid conversations with patients on appropriate use, storage and disposal of opioids.

# 20K+

overdose deaths per year are related to prescription pain relievers.<sup>1</sup>

# 75%

of opioid abusers started by taking prescribed medications, while that is true for 80% of heroin users.<sup>2</sup>

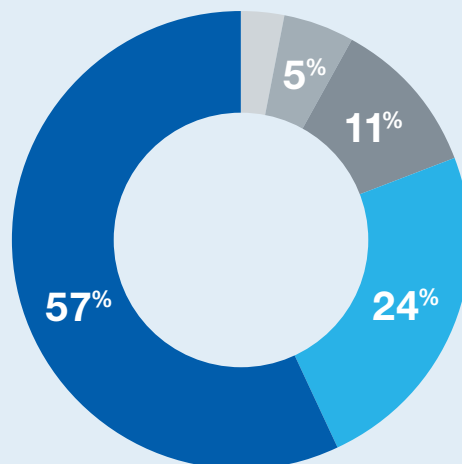
# 70%

of misused opioid prescriptions were obtained, stolen or purchased from a friend or relative.<sup>3</sup>

## Dentists' efforts to decrease opioid prescriptions have lagged behind other health care professionals.

### 10% of prescriptions made by dentists are opioids for:<sup>7</sup>

- Oral Surgery & Implants
- Exams & X-rays
- Endodontics
- Restorative



41% of prescriptions exceed the three-day supply guideline for acute pain.<sup>7</sup>

10% of all opioid prescriptions come from dentists, in part because 44% of wisdom teeth extractions for young people ages 15-24 result in an opioid prescription.<sup>8</sup>

## In 2016, the ADA approved a Statement on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain. The recommendations for dentists included:

<b>Conduct</b>	Conduct a thorough medical and dental history to determine current medications, potential drug interactions and potential for substance abuse.
<b>Follow</b>	Follow federal and state licensing board guidelines for safe opioid prescribing.
<b>Discuss</b>	Discuss with patients their role in preventing misuse and abuse, and the storage and disposal of opioids.
<b>Consider</b>	Consider non-steroidal analgesics as first-line therapy for the management of acute pain.
<b>Coordinate</b>	Coordinate with other treating doctors, including pain specialists, in the treatment of chronic facial pain.
<b>Encourage</b>	Encourage dentists, along with dental students and residents, to seek continuing education in addiction and pain management specific to opioid prescribing.

### In addition to supporting professional guidelines, UnitedHealthcare is working to:

- ✓ Manage opioid prescriptions for both acute and chronic pain through ongoing monitoring of factors such as the frequency of prescriptions, number of days the medication is being prescribed and the prescription strength.
- ✓ Partner with key stakeholders in managing the prevention and treatment of opioid abuse through analytics and active engagement, including patient education and partnerships with government, professional and consumer groups actively involved in trying to control the current epidemic.

**“Dentists have a significant responsibility and play an important role in helping reduce opioid use and misuse, which is why UnitedHealthcare is working with oral health professionals and our members in this crucial effort.”**

Ted Wong, DDS, MHA  
Chief Dental Officer  
UnitedHealthcare

**“By working together, the dental community and UnitedHealthcare can help address this important public health issue.”**

Michael D Weitzner, DMD, MS  
Vice President of Clinical Government Programs – Dental  
UnitedHealthcare

<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse

<sup>2</sup> Cicero TJ, Ellis MS, Surratt HL, Kurtz SP. The changing face of heroin use in the United States: a retrospective analysis of the past 50 years. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2014;71(7):821-826.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Annual Surveillance Report of Drug-Related Risks and Outcomes, United States, 2017)

<sup>4</sup> Denisco RC et al, Prevention of Opioid Abuse: The Role of the Dentist, *Journal of the American Dental Association*, JADA 142 (7), July 2011

<sup>5</sup> CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain – United States, 2016, Recommendations and Reports / March 18, 2016 / 65(1);1–49

<sup>6</sup> American Dental Association, Statement on the Use of Opioids in the Treatment of Dental Pain, ADA House of Delegates, October 2016

<sup>7</sup> Maughan, BC et al, *Drug Alcohol Depend*. 2016 Nov 1;168:328-334

<sup>8</sup> UnitedHealthcare claims analysis (2017)