America’s Opioid Crisis and the Dental Professional

As of 2015...

12.5 million people misused opioids
2 million people had an opioid use disorder
There have been 33 thousand deaths

Important Statistics
21-29% of patients using opioids for chronic pain misuse them
8-12% of these patients develop a use disorder
80% of heroin users begin by misusing prescription opioids

Opioids in Dentistry
As of 2012, dentists were responsible for 6.4% of all opioid prescriptions
Larger quantities were prescribed to younger age groups (11-18 year-olds)
31.1% were prescribed for nonsurgical visits

Exploring options and responsibilities

There is an opioid epidemic raging through the United States that is affecting thousands. Opioids are an extremely addictive drug classification indicated for severe pain causing thousands of deaths each year. Opioid use disorder is a complicated and multifaceted condition that is creates a very difficult cycle to break. It is comprised of dependence that physically changes the brain over time, cravings, and withdrawal symptoms.

Research suggests that a prescription of NSAIDs or acetaminophen is the most appropriate option in managing most cases of patients presenting with mild to moderate dental pain. Combination therapy of these drugs and an opioid could still be an appropriate answer for cases in which patients are experiencing more severe pain. When these are not indicated, as in such cases with severe pain, the dental professional must screen patients for potential risk factors and commit to proper prescription counseling. Per laws in Texas, dentists must keep up to date on the latest research covering controlled substances and participate in a prescription monitoring program.

Dentists and hygienists alike must be aware of the clinical signs of opioid intoxication and withdrawal as well as be prepared to offer cessation resources, advice, and support. Patients may benefit from a range of non-pharmacologic interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interventions, contingency management, and mindfulness to manage cravings. In these ways, dental professionals across America have a role in saving thousands of lives through prevention and have much to offer in doing their part in ending this extreme crisis.
REFERENCES

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