

Background

- Dentists are among the top opioid prescribers in North America and are often the source of initial exposure to these medications.
- On November 15, 2015, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (RCDSO) released opioid prescribing guidelines for the profession.

What were we investigating?

The impact of the new opioid prescribing guidelines on prescribing practices by dentists in Ontario.

RCDSO's Recommendations for Opioid Prescribing Include:

- Opioids should be a third-line therapy for acute dental pain after trying acetaminophen and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.
- When appropriate, opioid prescriptions should be limited to 36 tablets for 15 mg codeine combinations, or 24 tablets for 30 mg codeine combinations and 5 mg oxycodone combinations.

How was the study conducted?

- We conducted a population-based, cross-sectional time series analysis on Ontarians who received opioids for pain, prescribed by dentists between July 1, 2012 and September 30, 2017.
- We determined the total monthly rate per 100,000 population of individuals who received opioids from dentists, and the monthly volume of opioids dispensed to this population in morphine milligrams equivalent (MME) per 100 population.
- We stratified the monthly rate of individuals dispensed opioids by age group and reported individual and prescription level characteristics in the 22 months before and after guideline implementation.

What did we find?

- Over 1.1M Ontarians were dispensed an opioid prescription by a dentist, during our study period.
- The rate of individuals receiving prescription opioids from dentists did not change following the release of the guidelines. However, we observed a 28.1% decrease in the monthly volume of opioids dispensed from dentists (from 22.1 MME to 15.9 MME per 100,000 population between October 2015 and September 2017).
- The rate of individuals dispensed a prescription opioid from a dentist was highest among the 19-24 age group, and this rate typically increased during the summer months.
- While most (94.9%) of the prescriptions for 15 mg codeine combination products were within the recommended quantity limits, these opioids were not commonly dispensed. Among the more frequently dispensed opioids, 40.7% of prescriptions for 30 mg codeine combination products and 5 mg oxycodone combination products exceeded their recommended quantity threshold both before and after guideline release.



Key points

- Release of the new opioid prescribing guidelines for dentists did not impact the rate of individuals receiving opioid prescriptions for dental pain, but did decrease the monthly volume of opioids dispensed to these patients.
- Adults between the ages of 19-24 had the highest exposure to prescription opioids for acute dental pain.
- Almost half of the prescriptions for 30 mg codeine combination products and 5 mg oxycodone combination products exceeded the recommended quantity limits before and after guideline release. This suggests a need for improved guideline dissemination and uptake.

Recommendations

Policymakers

- Given the lack of change in the rate of individuals dispensed a prescription opioid from dentists as well as the large number of prescriptions exceeding recommended quantity thresholds, there is a need to promote evidence-informed dental opioid prescribing across the province.

Clinicians

- Dentists should carefully consider their opioid prescribing practices for acute pain, with a particular focus on prescription duration and quantity dispensed.

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