

The Benter Foundation

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December 3, 2021

Dr. Paul A. Moore, DMD, PhD, MPH
Chair, ADA Acute Pain Management Guidelines Committee
c/o ADA Science and Research Institute
The American Dental Association
211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60610-2678

RE: ADA Proposed Acute Pain Management Guidelines, 2022

Dear Dr. Moore:

At [The Benter Foundation](#), we're dedicated to helping communities and individuals thrive, especially in our hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. Because of this mission, we've grown increasingly concerned about the risks of unnecessary dental opioid prescribing to [patients, their family members](#) and communities. Despite the ADA's past Statement in May 2019, and other well-intended guidance, opioid prescribing in US dentistry continues at high levels.

This risk is especially acute for adolescents and young adults undergoing third molar or other tooth extractions. Research indicates that filling even a short term opioid prescription after wisdom tooth extraction [can lead to an alarmingly high rate](#) of later opioid use disorder and addiction among [young adults](#). And yet, despite [mounting evidence](#) substantiating these risks, and the ready availability of [better alternatives such as non-steroidal](#) anti-inflammatory drugs and acetaminophen, high rates of opioid prescribing persists for this procedure. In fact, [4 out of 5 dental opioid prescriptions](#) to adolescents and young adults are for tooth extraction. Dentists write [1.4 million opioid prescriptions](#) per year to adolescents and young adults. This implies that this procedure alone accounts for over 1.1 million prescriptions per year, and roughly one-third of all opioid prescriptions in this age group.

We applaud the ADA for updating its pain management guidance now that more studies have made evident the serious, preventable, long-term consequences of opioid prescriptions. It's time for even stronger, unequivocal acute pain management guidance from the ADA which highlights the dangers of opioids.

The ADA's revised guidelines should encourage dentists to move beyond opioids in pain management. We call on the ADA to strengthen and clarify its proposed language by spelling out that:

- NSAIDs and acetaminophen provide equal or better pain management without the side effects or risks associated with opioids.
- Opioid prescriptions should be avoided and never offered prophylactically for acute pain following routine dental procedures. Even short courses can lead to a measurably increased risk of misuse, addiction and overdose.
- Only in special circumstances or if initial alternatives fail, should opioids be prescribed.

Other areas of medicine have recognized the dangers of opioids and have adjusted their practices accordingly. In the US, prescriptions for codeine cough and cold medication declined by 90% between 2014-2019 for patients ages 0-17, while hydrocodone cough and cold medications [dropped by 75%](#).

The ADA has an opportunity to shape practice by issuing clear, unambiguous guidance that highlights safer alternatives and contraindicates opioids for all but the rarest cases in dentistry. Its current draft guidance still leaves too many opportunities for misinterpretation.

The Benter Foundation has funded research in this area at the University of Michigan and the University of Pittsburgh. The pain management specialists, statisticians and dental and medical leaders on these research teams have emphasized the need to not just reduce the duration or dose but to eliminate even short-term opioid prescriptions for uncomplicated tooth extractions and other routine dental procedures. Many more peer reviewed academic research findings have also underscored the dangers of opioids. The University of Pittsburgh has published an easy-to-use [chart](#) that guides dentists away from opioids and highlights better, safer, pain management options. University of Michigan researchers are documenting the effects of practice and policy-based interventions to discourage opioid dispensing in dentistry.

We urge the ADA to reflect these evidence-based findings in its new guidance. We ask the ADA to advocate strongly for the adoption of safe, established pain management techniques that avoid opioids. The future of the millions of people who undergo wisdom tooth extractions and other routine dental procedures each year, rests in the balance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William Benter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

William F. Benter
President, The Benter Foundation