Oral Health & The Opioid Epidemic



Oral health professionals write more than **1 in 9** of all opioid prescriptions, including

54% of opioid prescriptions to adolescents, in many cases after wisdom-teeth removal.[1]

75% of people who misuse opioids started by taking prescribed medications.[2]

Comprehensive Approach

UnitedHealthcare continues to expand its efforts to help address the connection between dental care and the opioid epidemic, including implementing policies and programs for health care providers and the public. The results of these efforts include:

89% reduction in prescriptions written outside recommended guidelines by network dentists to applicable UnitedHealthcare plan participants.[3]

9,500+ network dentists received informational mailings and, among the highest prescribers, customized information about their practice patterns.[4]

72,000 families with teens or young adults received informational materials about the risk of opioid addiction in connection to wisdom teeth removal.[4]

12% improvement in prescribing patterns by outlier dentists following informational mailings and follow-up calls.[3]

Tips to Help Reduce the Risk of Opioid Complications After Dental Care:

- Ask your dentist if opioids are necessary or if there are alternatives, including over-the-counter pain relievers such as a combination of acetaminophen and ibuprofen.
- If opioids are recommended, follow federal guidelines of the lowest effective dose for the shortest length of time (no more than 3 days and 50 morphine milligram equivalents per day).[5]
- Tell your dentist about any medications you are taking, as opioids can be deadly when mixed with other drugs, especially those that treat anxiety, sleeping disorders and seizures. Never mix alcohol with an opioid pain reliever.

[1] UnitedHealthcare pharmacy claims analysis representing more than 3 million claims, 2019
[2] 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.
[3] UnitedHealthcare internal analysis of claims data, 2019
[4] UnitedHealthcare internal analysis, 2019
[5] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/guidelines_at-a-glance-a.pdf

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