

New York State Dental Association

Public Hearing
NYS Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction & Overdose Prevention
November 15, 2019
Van Buren Hearing Room A
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12210

To: Senators Pete Harekham, David Carlucci and Gustavo Rivera
From: Payam Goudarzi DDS, President, New York State Dental Association

The New York State Dental Association (NYSDA), a constituent of the American Dental Association (ADA), is the professional association representing approximately 60% of the licensed dentists in New York State. As President, I am grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony before this important task force.

I want to begin by thanking you for recognizing that dentistry and the other healthcare professions have a role in combating opioid addiction and overdose. Joining together in this effort is an important step toward accomplishing your goal. With the implementation of I-STOP/PMP, New York State began to focus resources to improve healthcare overall by encouraging prescribers to consider the ways they manage pain and prescribe for their patients more carefully and safely. In addition, I-Stop is an important addition along with E-Prescribing to eliminate Dr. shopping by patients looking for multiple pain medication prescriptions. Even before the growth of opioid addiction grew to epidemic proportions, the dental profession has long been developing and implementing strategies to reduce addiction and overdoses, improve individual and community health, and address the harmful consequences of drug use. We suggest that a review of these efforts can be instructive moving forward.

Prevention and Non-Punitive Intervention

Since the mid-1980s, NYSDA has had a Committee on Chemical Dependency, a peer assistance program. This Committee is a resource for dentists, dental students, dental residents, and other oral health professionals impacted by addiction to opioids, alcohol and other drugs. The Committee's members assist individual dentists and students struggling with addiction to obtain needed treatment. The Committee encourages impaired dentists to enter the NYS Education Department's Professional Assistance Program (PAP). NYSDA was a driving force in legislation that resulted in the establishment of the PAP as an alternative to review by the Office of Professional Discipline. The PAP is a non-punitive pathway that allows licensed professionals to obtain treatment, maintain their licenses, and remain in practice. The availability of dentist-peers

statewide, available through NYSDA's Committee and the PAP, helps ensure that dentists who complete initial treatment can be monitored and supported on an ongoing basis.

Education is a cornerstone of prevention. Dentists and physicians must be prepared to treat patients who present under the influence of opioids and barbiturates. Administering or prescribing basic anesthesia and other drugs to these patients can result in serious interactions or death. NYSDA was at the forefront in developing an opioid abuse-training course for dentists even before New York State passed legislation mandating this training for healthcare providers. We were the first fully approved course and support this initiative, which we continue to offer to all healthcare practitioners

The electronic prescribing mandate and PMP are important steps in helping to curb opioid abuse in New York.

Access to Treatment

Access to treatment for opioid addiction is significantly impeded by inadequate financial resources. Even for those with insurance, few plans provide sufficient coverage to enable patients to obtain long-term in-patient treatment often needed to successfully enter recovery. Following treatment, patients also may face financial obstacles to ongoing monitoring and drug testing services to support and sustain recovery.

Addiction is a chronic disease. Health insurance companies treat it like an acute, episodic condition. Without a safety net, a relapse can be fatal. Following treatment, an individual no longer has the same tolerance for an opioid. Using the amount that was once needed to achieve a "high" instead can result in an overdose. NYS should consider mandating extended coverage for substance abuse therapy.

To summarize our recommendations:

1. We believe that with the addition of I-Stop/PMP, Opioid Abuse Course, E-Prescribing and new regulations only allowing a seven-day prescription for opioid pain medication, dentists are no longer a contributor to the opioid abuse epidemic in NY. We applaud these initiatives that have made NY a leader across the country in tackling this issue. We fully support them and educate the dental profession about them continually.
2. Make access to health care and mental health and counseling more readily available specifically to help reduce self-medicating behavior.
3. Train and encourage healthcare professionals to screen and educate patients and follow-up with patients following all prescribed opioid regimes.
4. Increase access to Naloxone training and overdose kits.
5. Increase access to financial support (insurance) to cover both more extended in-patient and any needed subsequent treatment to enable those affected to address this chronic condition.

6. Reduce the availability of black market drugs through programs to provide maintenance level prescription opioids and antagonists, e.g., methadone, suboxone.
7. Continue to provide resources to healthcare professionals to help promote public education, safe prescribing protocols, and effective pain management.