



CPA responds to the opioid crisis

It is well known that Canada is in the midst of a crisis. Just open a newspaper or listen to the evening news for the devastating facts:

- 914 dead in British Columbia in 2016 due to opioid overdose
- 13 Canadians hospitalized each day due to opioid poisoning
- In Ontario young adults, 1 in 8 deaths related to opioids

What may not be as well known is that many of these injuries and deaths are related to prescription opioids, and that opioid prescribing has more than quadrupled in the past 20 years.

Canada is the second most prescribed nation with regards to opioids - it is estimated that one in six Canadians use opioids to treat pain.¹ The US is currently ranked first, with enough opioid prescriptions written each year to provide each adult with their own bottle of pills. Australia is beginning to experience an opioid crisis, but is far behind North America. Other parts of the world, however, are not experiencing the same issue.

Pain may be one of the causes of this epidemic. Patients in pain are being prescribed painkillers at an alarming rate. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US, while opioids may play a role in managing chronic pain, they should be used only after conservative measures have been exhausted.

In Canada, pain is the most common reason for seeking health care, and accounts for up to 78% of visits to the emergency department.² As a profession, physiotherapy must work to provide upstream solutions to the crisis - and prevent the first prescription of opioids. So what can CPA, its branches, and individual members do to help lessen the effects of this crisis?

¹ Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey 2012 http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/stat/_2012/summary-sommaire-eng.php#s5

² Todd, K.H., J. Ducharme, M. Choiniere, C.S Crandall, D.E. Fosnocht, P. Homel, P. Tanabe and f. t. P. S. Group (2007). "Pain in the emergency department: results of the Pain and Emergency Medicine Initiative (PEMI) Multicentre Study." J Pain 8: 460B466

CPA is advocating for the role of physiotherapy in the treatment of pain, and in reducing the nation's reliance on opioids. We are talking to MPs about the need for the federal government to improve access to physiotherapy in areas under its jurisdiction (First Nations and Inuit Health, Canadian Forces, RCMP, and the federal public service health plan). We are making our voice heard in national conversations, like the Canadian Opioid Summit and its accompanying Joint Statement of Action. And we are working with the Coalition for Safe and Effective Pain Management to gather evidence and advocate for better access to conservative pain treatment.

CPA is launching a public advocacy campaign in conjunction with National Physiotherapy Month 2017. We have partnered with APTA and are embarking on a North American response to the opioid crisis. APTA has kindly allowed us to adapt their messaging as part of NPM.

As Canadian health care is delivered provincially/territorially, it is imperative that provincial decision makers also hear the physiotherapy message. Branches play a vital role in delivering this message. As part of their advocacy work, provincial and territorial branches are pushing for better access to physiotherapy (especially in rural and remote communities) and the inclusion of physiotherapy in primary health care initiatives to help alleviate the effect of the opioid crisis. CPA will help to provide resources to assist branches in their efforts.

As members, we need to be informed. We need to be educated. Read up on the issue, and speak with colleagues about how physiotherapy can help. We need to become involved. We need to share the information in our communities and volunteer at the branch level. Finally, we need to continually act in the best interests of our clients by listening to their stories, advocating for their needs, and being skillful in our clinical work.

As a profession, physiotherapy has much to offer to those in pain. It then becomes apparent that we similarly have much to offer in easing the burden of the opioid crisis. When we work together, we can achieve great things.

For more information about CPA's Pain Management and Opioids project, please contact Melissa Anderson, CPA Senior Policy Advisor, manderson@physiotherapy.ca. Access professional resources here: <https://physiotherapy.ca/opioids-and-pain-management>.

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