

**“Treating Between the Lines”**  
**Understanding Rx & Illicit Drug Abuse**  
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**Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the presentation, the dental professional will be able to:

Detect patients with substance abuse disorders using the physical, oral, and behavioral clues of the 3 most commonly abused drugs; depressants, stimulants, and opioids.

Discuss substance abuse with patients and communicate effectively your professional responsibilities and ethical boundaries in treating patients with substance use disorders.

Select evidence-based strategies for managing dental pain.

## Step 1: Detection

**Depressants-** Benzodiazepines (Valium, Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan), barbiturates (Phenobarbital, Mebaral), sleep aids (Soma, Sonata, Lunesta), alcohol which cause euphoria, calmness, and relaxation.

- Physical Clues: Drowsiness, clumsiness, spider angiomas, dilated pupils, irritability, amnesia
- Oral Clues: Dry mouth, lingual erosion, oral cancer, periodontal disease



**Stimulants-** Adderall, Ritalin, Focalin, Concerta, methamphetamine, cocaine, crack, ecstasy which cause euphoria, energy, attention, focus and hypersexuality.

- Physical Clues: Insomnia, mood changes, dilated pupils, elevated blood pressure, extreme weight loss, skin pops
- Oral Clues: Dry mouth, “meth mouth” (blackened, broken, rotted teeth), extremely poor oral hygiene, attrition



### **Step 1: Detection (continued)**

**Opioids**-Vicodin, Oxycodone, Methadone, Fentanyl, heroin which cause euphoria, analgesia, anti-anxiety, state of well-being.

- Physical Clues: Lethargy, constricted pupils, track marks, weight loss, pain intolerance, hypothermia
- Oral Clues: Dry mouth, cuspal caries, poor oral hygiene, attrition



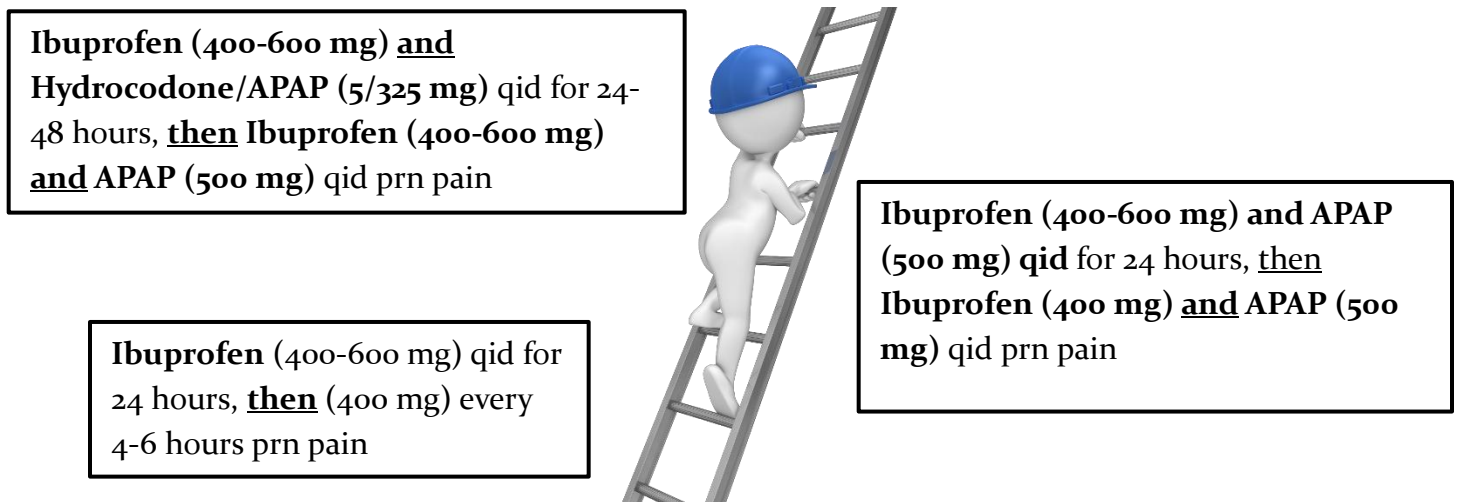
### **Step 2: Discussion**

- Use motivational interviewing
- Educate your patients about the risks associated with Rx and illicit drug misuse, dependency, addiction
- Be objective
- Speak about your core professional values of building relationships, improving oral health outcomes, and helping your patients.

### **Step 3: Selection of Pain Management Strategies**

- Assess patients who may be at-risk or with a substance-use disorder
- Develop an individualized pain management plan based upon the patient's medical history, risk assessment, and level of pre-operative pain and anticipated post-operative pain
- Use non-opioid analgesics (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory with or without acetaminophen) as first-line approach to managing acute dental pain
- Use of opioid analgesics should follow principle of "lowest dose, shortest duration"

### Step 3: Selection of Pain Management Strategies (continued)



### Where to get help for a substance use disorder

- CIUSS West-Central Montral: Offers psychosocial support and addiction prevention services for individuals aged 14 and older. Contact Info-Social at 811, option 2 for assistance
- Drugs: Help and Referral (DHR) provides support, information and referrals to anyone worried about their use of drugs, alcohol and/or medication, as well as, to their loved ones.
  - Counselors available 24/7 via telephone or chat in Montral area at 514-527-2626 and everywhere in Québec at 800-265-2626

### Resources

- Patient Information Sheets - Drug Information Sheets for parents, educators, and care providers. [Drug Fact Sheets | Get Smart About Drugs](#)
- Sample Consent Form [ADAP EXAMPLE Acute Opioid Rx Informed Consent.pdf](#)

## Resources (continued)

- Brown R., Chan WY & Whyte F. (2023) C.E. Credit. **Harm Reduction: A Strategy to Improve Outcomes for Dental Patients with Substance-Use Disorders**, Journal of the California Dental Association, 51:1, DOI: [10.1080/19424396.2023.2242570](https://doi.org/10.1080/19424396.2023.2242570)
- Brown RE, Morisky D, Silverstein SJ. **Meth Mouth Severity in Response to Drug-use Patterns and Dental Access in Methamphetamine Users**, Journal of the California Dental Association, 41:6, 421-428, DOI: [10.1080/19424396.2013.12222319](https://doi.org/10.1080/19424396.2013.12222319)
- **A State of Decay, Your Dental Guide to Understanding and Treating “Meth Mouth,”** by Ronni Brown, DDS, MPH. Available at [A State of Decay: Guide to Understanding and Treating Meth Mouth](#)
- **Patient Brochures on the Oral Effects of Methamphetamine**© by Ronni Brown, DDS, MPH, FADI Patient Brochures to educate patients about the oral impacts of methamphetamine misuse. Available at [Prevent Meth Mouth | Educational brochures for dental practices](#)
- **Patient Drug Use-How to Be Caring**, by Ronni Brown DDS, MPH. Dental Product Shopper, 19(6),2025. <https://www.dentalproductshopper.com/blog/patient-drug-use--be-curious--be-caring>
- **How to use fluoride varnish in patients with “meth mouth.”** by Ronni Brown DDS, MPH. Dental Products Report 51(9), 2017. [How to use fluoride varnish in patients with ‘meth mouth’](#)
- Sheff, D. **Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction.** Beautiful Boy chronicles the heartbreaking and inspiring experience of survival, relapse, and recovery in a family coping with addiction over many years.

- **“Take Your Pill”** Netflix Original Movie. In a hypercompetitive world, drugs like Adderall offer students, athletes, coders, and others a way to do more, faster and better. But at what cost? [Watch Take Your Pills | Netflix Official Site](#)