Dr. Kudirat Jimoh - Pattern of opioid prescription by dentists in Nova Scotia

Chiraz: We continue our conversation about the opioids crisis and its impact on dentists and dentistry. Recently, a group of researchers at Dalhousie University published a study on the pattern of opioid analgesic prescription for adults by dentists in Nova Scotia, in the hope of bringing awareness to an issue that is fast evolving and far reaching. Dr. Kudirat Jimoh is a graduate periodontics resident in the Faculty of Dentistry at Dalhousie University and the corresponding author of the study. She joins me today to give us more details on the study and its findings. Dr. Jimoh, it is a pleasure to speak with you and I welcome you to this Oasis Conversation.

Dr. Jimoh: Thank you very much.

Chiraz: So, my first question is what is the study about and why did you undertake it?

Dr. Jimoh: So, the study actually looked at the prevalence and pattern of opioid analgesic prescription by dentists in Nova Scotia from January 2011 to December 2015. We did this by using the record of the opioids dispensed that is kept by the Nova Scotia Monitoring body over those years. And, why did we undertake this? It was [for] understanding Canadian dentists' contribution to the opioid crisis as it were, and then because dentists in the United States have been reported to be amongst the leading prescribers of opioid analgesics, so whether it's limited information on Canadian dentists and opioid prescriptions. So, we wanted to find out, is it the same thing in Canada as the data in the US or is it just, is this different? So, that was one of the reasons why we did the research.

Chiraz: So, what did you find?

Dr. Jimoh: So, we did find that for dentists registered in Nova Scotia that 70, about 75 percent of dentists registered in Nova Scotia actually do prescribe opioids. And of all the opioid prescribers in Nova Scotia dentists were just 17 percent; and they prescribed less than 0.4% of the total dosage of opioid analgesics that were prescribed for those five years. And then another thing was that general dentists prescribed about 52 to 61 percent of the total dosage dispensed although they made up like 91% of dentists in Nova Scotia anyway. And, then the oral maxillofacial surgeons prescribed above 42 percent of the total dosage dispensed, though codeine formulations were the most frequently prescribed, followed by hydromorphone, then oxycodone formulations.

Chiraz: For me, that's a good story. That's a good news story for us. Am I interpreting those findings correctly?

Dr. Jimoh: Yeah. Yeah. If you look at the fact that 17% of opioid prescribers in Nova Scotia are dentists; dentists just make up 17%. Well, that's good and that whatever we contribute to the whole opioid [inaudible] is just about 0.4%, which is good. But then when you look at the raw scores in unit numbers, It's a lot too. So, if we prescribed 0.4% of what's out there, I think. I think we're doing good. I think.
Chiraz: So, we're prescribing it for the required procedure at the right time for the right patient; we're not overprescribing opioid analgesics?

Dr. Jimoh: Well, because what we had was just aggregate data, we couldn't really tell what procedures they were being prescribed for, or what kind of patients were they prescribed for, or in terms of dosage that would be described by day by dentists. We found that a dentist prescribed about 14 morphine equivalents per day, which is less than the recommended maximum daily dose. Though we found out dentists tend to prescribe for longer days than recommended.

Chiraz: So, in your study you make a distinction between prescribed and dispensed opioid prescriptions. Can you elaborate further on that please?

Dr. Jimoh: Well, we did use dispense because the record kept by the board is what is dispensed at the community pharmacies. We don't know how many prescriptions were written because studies have shown that a third of prescriptions are not filled by patients. If we had like a record of the prescriptions that were written, that could give us a better idea of what was prescribed, but in terms of what was dispensed or what is available out there and we were using what was available to patients.

Chiraz: What are some of the implications of your study on dental practice?

Dr. Jimoh: So, one of the main implications is the fact that there's a need for dentists to review opioid prescription pattern and when to prescribe opioid analgesics for how long and what are the recommended guidelines or protocols in terms of pain management. And then there's also a need to develop guidelines for dental pain and dental procedural pain control.

Chiraz: What is the take-away message from your study?

Dr. Jimoh: Well, from this study, the takeaway message is though it seems dentists may be prescribing a very small percentage of the opioid analgesic dispensed compared to other prescribers, this is still a lot of opioid analgesics in absolute numbers when you look at the numbers out there. So, there's still a need for dentists to reassess and view their opioid analgesic prescription patterns in terms of when to prescribe opioid analgesics, what dose to prescribe and for how long.

Chiraz: And is there any subsequent research that needs to be done that sheds light on the topic?

Dr. Jimoh: Well, I think this study could be reproduced in other provinces in Canada, just to give us a general idea of what's out there. And then we could also do things in terms of what procedures do dentists actually prescribe opioids for and why would they prescribe it for how long? So, that would be more going in the sense of solving this: why do you prescribe opioid analgesics, when do you prescribe them and for how long. So, that will
give us a better idea of what’s actually going on. And I think this is something that can be done in every province, really in Canada.

Chiraz: Perfect. Dr. Jimoh, I cannot thank you enough for taking the time and speaking with me today. I wish you all the best in your endeavors and congratulations on the graduation, on the completion of your program. I hope to host you again on Oasis.

Dr. Jimoh: Thank you very much, it was my pleasure.