

## Prescription Drug Abuse

# BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION

On April 30, the Conference Board of Canada hosted a symposium to help identify possible measures against prescription drug abuse and to support informed prescription of opioid analgesics.

The *Innovations and Policy Solutions for Addressing Prescription Drug Abuse* symposium brought together representatives from the pharmaceutical industry, government, professional regulatory bodies and associations, and organizations involved in harm reduction in the area of drug abuse. Dr. John O’Keefe, CDA director of Knowledge Networks, and Dr. Gilles Lavigne, dean of the University of Montreal faculty of dental medicine and president-elect of the Canadian Pain Society, were among the attendees.



The event was an opportunity for the profession to network with key organizations and for participants to achieve a common understanding of the issues and best practices for curbing prescription drug abuse. “Many attendees were surprised to learn that dentists prescribe opioids at all,” says Dr. Lavigne. “And they were just as disconcerted to hear about the potential for misuse and diversion—after all, we often treat younger populations who undergo wisdom teeth extraction.”

Topics on the agenda included the societal harms of prescription drug abuse, practical

approaches to prevent drug diversion and abuse, the science of abuse-deterrence technology, the use of media to encourage societal change, and panel discussions focused on policy solutions.

From a dentistry standpoint, solutions might lie in educating both clinicians and patients. “We need to encourage the prescription of low-dosage, low-risk analgesics, and remind patients to bring back to their pharmacist any unused prescription drug,” acknowledges Dr. Lavigne. Some participants expressed similar views, mentioning that dentists should avoid prescribing opioids where other medications may be adequate, and try not to prescribe more pills than what would likely suffice. “We also need to give dentists and their teams tools to help identify subjects at risk,” adds Dr. Lavigne.

The attendees recognized the need for greater dialogue between expert groups to develop joint harm-reduction strategies, and for stronger collaboration between healthcare professionals. With this in mind, representatives from major health associations plan on joining forces to mitigate the complex societal problem of prescription drug abuse.

It was also mentioned at the symposium that the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario is currently developing guidelines on the prescription of opioids. ♦



**Dr. Gilles Lavigne**

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