Preface

From Crisis to Opportunity

Currently, on average, 130 people die daily in the United States due to opioid over-dosage.¹ The opioid epidemic has become a national crisis due to the overprescribing of potent oral opioids in human medicine. To quote drug policy expert, Keith Humphreys²:

*The biggest misconception is that the US is normal in how it handles prescription opioids.*

*So let’s compare ourselves to another country. Japan, for example. Older population than us; you would think more aches and pains. Universal access to health care, so more opportunities to prescribe.*

*So consider the amount of standard daily doses of opioids consumed in Japan. And then double it. And then double it again. And then double it again. And then double it again. And then double it a fifth time. That would make Japan No. 2 in the world, behind the United States.*

*Every other developed country does at least as good or as poor a job as we do managing pain—while not using opioids at anywhere near the same level.*

With the current opioid crisis raging, the pendulum has now swung from an abundance of opioids available to doctors to a shortage. The increased oversight regarding opioid prescriptions has affected not only hospital supplies but also veterinary access. Given this new restricted access and availability of opioids, we must expand our analgesic options in veterinary medicine. Furthermore, as increasing research is demonstrating, opioids may have negative impacts on immune function, gastrointestinal motility, and ultimately, patient outcomes with increased length of hospitalization in patients with high opioid consumption.
Both our increasingly limited access to opioids and growing knowledge of their detrimental effects require us to look beyond opioids for pain management in our patients. This issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* presents cutting-edge research into the effects of opioids in surgical patients as well as a wide array of options for managing pain in order to reduce the use of opioids. We are grateful to our colleagues for their expertise in analgesic options to guide our treatment of patients as we navigate the opioid crisis and aim to reduce opioid use in the future.

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REFERENCES
