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October 17, 2017

The Honorable Jefferson B. Sessions, III
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

The American Medical Association (AMA) agrees with your recent statements that urgent action is needed to end the nation's opioid epidemic. This effort must be rooted in overdose prevention and treatment of those with opioid use disorders. This epidemic has touched us all, and the AMA is committed to reversing its terrible toll on our patients and communities. In mutual support of this shared goal, we would like to meet with you to discuss several issues.

First, we agree that a data-driven, targeted strategy is the right approach, and the AMA strongly supports efforts to identify and prosecute those who engage in criminal activity. Physicians or other health care professionals who break the law must be held accountable. We are aware, however, of increasing reports of physicians who no longer are willing to treat patients with chronic pain due to fear of prosecution. It is critical that law enforcement initiatives be targeted to true criminal enterprises and avoid focusing on legitimate medical practitioners. It is also important to avoid stigmatizing patients with pain and/or substance use disorders and the physicians who treat them. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue in greater detail.

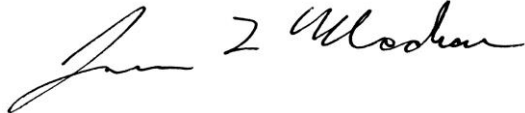
Second, we also would like to discuss the multiple measures taken by states—and physicians—to reduce the number of opioid analgesic prescriptions issued and other efforts to reverse the nation's opioid epidemic. West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and all other states have experienced significant decreases in opioid prescriptions and large increases in using prescription drug monitoring programs. There has been no analysis, however, of whether and to what degree the policies and changes in practice implemented to date have improved pain care for patients. Furthermore, while the overwhelming emphasis continues to be on opioid supply side reductions, there has been little emphasis by policymakers or payers on improving access to non-opioid pain relief. We were pleased to see the nation's state attorneys general urge America's Health Insurance Plans to increase access to non-opioid pain care. We would like an opportunity to discuss how we can support those efforts and also engage your support for increased access to non-opioid pain care. We are also interested in discussing coverage of substance use treatment and related mental health services by both private and public payers.

Finally, we appreciate your support for treatment of patients with substance use disorders and echo your concerns about the staggering increases in heroin and illicit fentanyl related overdose and death. This is yet another area where I believe we can work together to ensure that we protect patients' access to care while implementing effective overdose prevention and treatment strategies.

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The AMA would like to work with the Department of Justice on targeted strategies that are consistent with the Trump Administration's priorities and ongoing efforts. Please have your staff contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President for Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org or 202-789-7409 so we can set up a meeting to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

James L. Madara, MD