

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Diverted Pharmaceutical Drugs Widely Available Across U.S.; Decreases Seen in States with Prescription Monitoring Programs

The availability of diverted pharmaceutical narcotic, depressant, and stimulant drugs is high and increasing across most parts of the United States, according to the *2007 National Drug Threat Assessment*, issued by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC). More than three-fourths (78.8%) of state and local law enforcement agencies report high or moderate availability of diverted pharmaceuticals in their area. Following are specific findings from the report, based on analysis of the most recently available law enforcement, intelligence, and public health data.

- The internet is an increasingly prevalent source of diverted pharmaceutical drugs and such drugs are often obtained through internet pharmacies without proof of prescription, consultation, or doctor's examination.
- While the diversion of pharmaceuticals is widespread, the availability of such drugs has been reduced in some areas. These reductions are most evident in states that have implemented Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMPs),* particularly Kentucky, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, and Utah.
- "Many pharmaceutical drug abusers are substituting illegal drugs, especially in areas where pharmaceutical drug diversion has been reduced" (p. 20). Law enforcement and public health reports from California, Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin indicate that some opiate abusers who began abusing OxyContin® have switched to using heroin.
- The increased use of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags** attached to or placed within pharmaceutical packaging can decrease diversion, as well as identify vulnerable areas in the supply chain and aid law enforcement investigations.

*Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PMPs) are systems that collect controlled substance prescription data in a centralized database in order to detect trends in diversion and abuse. As of June 2006, 32 states had legislation requiring PMPs and 16 states were proposing, preparing, or considering such legislation.

** RFID tags enable companies to continuously track, trace, and authenticate the chain of custody for pharmaceuticals, including individual prescription bottles. The FDA has recommended widespread use of RFID in the pharmaceutical supply chain, utilizing a phased-in approach in which placing RFID tags on products most vulnerable to counterfeiting and diversion is the first step.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), *National Drug Threat Assessment, 2007*, 2006. Available online at <http://www.usdoj.gov/ndic/pubs21/21137/index.htm>.

Historic Drug Czar Conference DVD Now Available!

On June 17th, 2006, CESAR and the Institute for Behavior and Health sponsored a Drug Czar Conference at the University of Maryland. The one-day meeting featured seven of the eleven men who have served as heads of the White House drug abuse prevention office. An unedited 6 DVD set of this historic meeting is now available for \$95, including shipping. Ordering information is available online at <http://www.cesar.umd.edu>.

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