



PRESCRIPTION MONITORING PROGRAM CENTER OF EXCELLENCE Announcement March 18, 2010

CDC Issue Brief on Unintentional Drug Poisoning: The Role of PMPs

To PMP staff and administrators:

Today's CDC issue brief, "[Unintentional Drug Poisoning in the United States](#)" mentions the role prescription monitoring programs can play in responding to the growing epidemic of opioid overdoses and deaths. The report summarizes trend data showing a steep increase in unintentional drug overdose deaths from 1990 to 2006, with the rate per 100,000 rising five-fold over that period. In 2006 "overdose deaths were second only to motor vehicle crashes among leading causes of injury death...in the United States," with opioid analgesics "involved in more overdose deaths than heroin and cocaine combined." In 2008, the number of emergency department visits involving the non-medical use of prescription or over-the-counter drugs was equal to those involving illicit substances (~ 1.0 million).

In its section on recommendations, the issue brief calls for health care providers and states to be proactive in using PMPs to reduce overdoses and deaths. For health care providers, the brief recommends that they

...periodically request a report from your state prescription drug monitoring program on the prescribing of opioids to your patients by other providers.

Note that these are *solicited* reports, dependent on the prescriber's initiative.

Directed at state and federal agencies, the brief also recommends that

To the extent permitted by applicable law, state prescription drug monitoring programs should routinely send reports to providers on patients less than 65 years old if they are being treated with opioids for more than 6 weeks by two or more providers or if there are signs of inappropriate use of controlled substances. (If legal authority to do so does not exist, work toward obtaining that authority.)

Note that these reports are *unsolicited*, possibly triggered by a threshold indicator of suspected abuse or diversion (age less than 65, opioid tx > 6 weeks, 2 or more providers). Note also the CDC's suggestion that PMPs pursue authority to release such unsolicited reports if they do not already have it. Evidence suggests that PMPs that issue both solicited and unsolicited reports may be more effective than those with solicited reports alone.¹

¹ Simeone, R., Holland, L. 2006. An Evaluation of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, text at <http://www.simeoneassociates.com/simeone3.pdf>.

It is encouraging that the CDC and, in particular Len Paulozzi, M.D., are drawing attention both to the extent of prescription drug abuse and to the role PMPs can play in combating this epidemic. We recommend this report to your attention. It can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Poisoning/brief.htm>.
