

Prescription Monitoring Program – Promoting Patient Safety by Chris Baumgartner, Washington State Department of Health

“This program has changed my practice. No single thing in the last 10 years has had such a positive impact on my practice and my patients as this program, so thank you!” These words from a Washington State emergency room physician are typical of the feedback we’ve received about a relatively new program called the [Prescription Monitoring Program \(PMP\)](#).

Another physician told us: “I believe this program has literally saved the lives of several of my patients. I have been floored by the number of narcotics that dozens of teenage girls have been obtaining (1,500 to 2,000 pills in six months). I have now been able to have meaningful interventions with them and their families.”

The department has established several prevention initiatives including the Prescription Monitoring Program. A main reason was to help combat drug overdose deaths due mostly to the misuse or abuse of prescription drugs, the leading cause of accidental deaths here in Washington State.

The program collects information on the purchases of pain medications and other potentially dangerous medicines. The information comes from pharmacies and health care providers. It is then used to help improve patient safety and reduce prescription drug misuse.

Actual data collection began in October 2011, and health care providers started requesting information in January 2012. By the end of June 2013, more than 9,000 prescribers and 2,900 pharmacists were using the program, which averages more than 900,000 records per month. It now holds more than 22.8 million prescription records. So far, pharmacists, prescribers, and prescriber delegates have made more than 700,000 patient history requests.

In 2012, more than 2.3 million Washingtonians filled at least one prescription for a controlled substance. Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen (the generic form of Vicodin, a pain reliever) is the most dispensed controlled substance and makes up roughly 25 percent of all the prescriptions we collect. There were more than 156 million pills dispensed for this drug in 2012, enough for each person in the state to receive 23 pills.

Who Can Access Data

The law allows health care providers, patients, and others to view the prescription records for certain reasons. Prescribers and pharmacists can use the data to intervene with patients earlier. They can also identify dangerous drug interactions, address issues of misuse, and recognize under-managed pain or the need for substance abuse treatment. Health professional licensing boards and law enforcement can view the records based on authorized investigations.

What the Future Holds

The department is pleased with the success the program so far. With additional grant funding recently received, there are plans for several improvements. We plan to share data on patients filling prescriptions across borders, to connect with our health information exchange to provide more seamless access for providers, and make other improvements.

A third physician shared with us: “I really am grateful to have the PMP active. It is absolutely essential for any pain management practice and essential for any physician prescribing controlled substances”.

You can find more information on the program, also known as [Prescription Review](#), online (www.doh.wa.gov/PMP). Contact program director [Chris Baumgartner](#), 360-236-4806, for more information.