



Office of MUI/Registry Unit

Ted Strickland, Governor
John L. Martin, Director

Health & Safety Alert #42-03-10

Theft of Medications

Purpose of This Alert

A review of Major Unusual Incidents (MUIs) for calendar year 2009 revealed an ongoing trend of medication thefts. This trend is concerning as medications are accessible throughout our service delivery system. Current literature refers to this phenomenon as “Drug Diversion.” In other words, drugs are diverted from their original source and end up for sale on the streets or used to support another’s addiction. Prescription drug abuse accounts for over 30% of the overall drug problem in the U.S.

According to Pilar Kraman with the Council of State Governments, this problem is also an emerging trend nationally. In 1990, 628,000 individuals abused pain medications for the first time. By the year 2000, that number had increased to nearly 3 million, and has continued to grow.

This is an alarming trend that is affecting our service delivery system. Attention to detail through providers, county boards and the department will be necessary in the future as we encounter these issues.

The following have been identified as targeted medications in various MUIs during calendar year 2009:

Adderall	Depakote	Percocet
Ativan	Hydrocodone	Risperdal
Baclofen	Lithium	Tizanidine
Clonazepam	Lorazepam	Viagra
Clozaril	Oxycodone	Vicodin

Stealing individuals’ medications can result in serious outcomes, such as:

1. The individual doesn’t receive medications as prescribed by the treating physician.
2. The individual may be in unnecessary pain/discomfort.
3. The individual may not progress medically, as expected.

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4. Withdrawal or relapse may occur as a result of not receiving medications as prescribed.

The following helpful hints have been provided to assist with proactively preventing medication thefts.

Preventing or Reducing Occurrences of Medication Theft

- Establish a sound accounting system for all medications:
 - Include a safe/secure storage area with very limited access.
 - Track who is dispensing medications with accountability.
 - Conduct a regular inventory of medications. The frequency should be such that discrepancies can be easily resolved.
 - Track the dispensing of medication including the who, what, and when.
 - Medication errors need to be reported and addressed as part of the system.
 - When a discrepancy is identified it is important to resolve it as soon as possible. If it cannot be resolved, it is important to begin a tracking system to look at the discrepancies over time.
 - Management should monitor on a regular basis, the administration of medication to ensure it is being done correctly.
 - Train support staff on the importance of proper medication administration and storage.
 - Store only those medications necessary to have on-hand (avoid overstocking).

- Practices to avoid:
 - Leaving medication unsecured.
 - Multiple support staff dispersing medications without ongoing oversight.
 - Failure to reconcile medications regularly to assure medication administrative procedures are being followed.
 - Overstocking medications for convenience.
 - Co-mingling medications without a strict system for safe individual dispersal.

Stay alert to signs of drug abuse by caregivers and intervene appropriately. Using drugs while caring for individuals has a risk of harm to individuals through possible neglect and/or abuse.

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

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