The following is a compendium of news reports over the past month that may be of interest to our AG offices who are dealing with substance abuse issues. Neither the National Association of Attorneys General nor the National Attorneys General Training & Research Institute expresses a view as to the accuracy of news accounts, nor as to the position expounded by the authors of the hyperlinked articles.

DECEMBER 2013

New Developments in Combatting Prescription Drug Abuse
Montana is working to expand its Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP). The Montana Board of Crime Control will use a $380,000 grant to expand its PDMP to enable data sharing with other states.

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine has formed a new unit within his office that will combat the increased use of heroin across his state. The Attorney General’s Heroin Unit will include investigators, attorneys, and drug abuse specialists, and will work to fight the heroin epidemic at the grassroots level.

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed a bill which will create a new PDMP. This legislation would amend the existing database of prescription drugs. Currently, Pennsylvania’s data base only tracks Schedule II drugs and cannot track Schedule III, IV and V controlled substances. The bill will also expand access to the database to include pharmacists and health care providers.

DEA Updates
The DEA released its 2013 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary. The report showed that prescription drug abuse continues to be the nation’s fastest growing drug problem. Additionally, while the availability and use of cocaine continues to decrease, the availability and use of heroin has increased throughout the country. Methamphetamine and marijuana availability has increased as well. The report also addresses the emergence of the abuse of synthetic designer drugs and examines the availability and use of MDMA. A full copy of the report can be accessed by using this link.

The DEA recently held a Media Roundtable, addressing the issues surrounding designer synthetic drugs. Topics included the latest trends in designer drugs, analogue laws, and the DEA’s efforts in combating this epidemic. Those interested in a full summary of the roundtable should contact Francesca Liquori at fliquori@naag.org or (202) 326-6041.

The DEA held its seventh National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day on October 26, 2013. In total, 324 tons of expired and unwanted medications were turned in throughout the country.

States Are Taking Steps to Prevent and Treat Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome
Indiana lawmakers are working with the Indiana Attorney General to draft legislation that would require medical professionals to report cases of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) to the State Board of Health. Members of the Indiana Attorney General’s Prescription Abuse Task Force have stated that the problem of NAS has reached epidemic levels in Indiana and that legislation is necessary to regulate prescription painkillers and to increase penalties for those who abuse drugs or supply drugs to others.

The Tennessee Department of Health reports that the number of babies born with drug dependencies in Tennessee is higher than ever, with 714 cases reported as of the first week of November. The majority of the babies were dependent
on prescription drugs. Approximately 42% of their mothers used prescription pills for legitimate treatment. State leaders have founded the Neonatal Abstinence Subcabinet Working Group to reduce the problem by providing information to doctors and the public developing lasting solutions.

**Recent Studies Relating to Drug Abuse**

One in 10 teens treated in an emergency room has admitted to misusing prescription painkillers and sedatives at least once in the past year, according to a recent study by the University of Michigan, as reported by Medical Daily. Only about 15% of the teens had a valid prescription for the pills. The average age for first time users of prescription pills is 13 to 14 years old. The full report was published in Pediatrics, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and can be accessed by using this link.

A recent study published online in the Medical Care journal and led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that the identification and treatment of pain has failed to improve over the last decade, while the use of prescription opioid use has nearly doubled and the rate of use of alternatives to opioids has either stayed the same or declined.

**Other News of Interest**

Chicago is considering suing the producers of narcotics painkillers. Lawyers for the city are investigating whether the manufacturers of opioids overstated the benefits of the drugs and understated the drugs’ risks. If the city brings suit, it will seek to recover millions of dollars spent on opioids prescribed to city employees and retirees.

As detailed in the November 2013 Substance Abuse Newsletter, the FDA recently approved Zohydro, a new opioid painkiller. It is now reported that Alkermes, the manufacturer of Zohydro, also manufactures Vivitrol, a form of naltrexone, which is a pill used to treat alcoholism and opioid addiction. Alkermes also provides financial support to the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

The United States Supreme Court is considering whether a drug dealer who sold heroin to an individual who ingested the heroin, together with a number of other controlled substances, and died of an overdose can be held responsible for that individual’s death. The heroin was a contributing factor to the individual’s death but medical experts could not say whether the individual would have died had he not ingested the heroin. Oral arguments were heard on November 12. The case is Barrage v. United States.

The American Medical Association (AMA) voted to reaffirm its opposition to marijuana legalization. It deleted a portion of its policy recommendations that urged “modification of state law to reduce the severity of penalties for possession of marijuana” and replaced that line with language supporting “modification of state and federal laws to emphasize public health based strategies to address and reduce cannabis use.” The full language of the AMA’s Reference Committee Report can be accessed by using this link.

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