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.

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States’ Efforts to Combat Drug Abuse
Kentucky officials have proposed new legislation to combat the increased use of heroin in their state. The bill will increase funding for anti-drug education, establish harsher penalties for drug traffickers, increase the availability of Narcan, and require the Kentucky Medicaid program to pay for substance-abuse treatment. Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway indicated that the legislation will provide an incentive for more organizations to begin providing drug treatment for heroin abuse.

On January 29, a Veterans Treatment Court will open in Boston, Massachusetts. This will be the second such court within the state. The court will provide services to veterans who are struggling with issues relating to criminal charges, substance abuse and mental health.

In New Jersey, stakeholders have made many efforts to reduce the use of heroin and other opioids. A task force created by Governor Christie released a 98 page report recommending strong oversight of prescribing practices, education and expanded treatment options. The Attorney General’s office established an opiates task force which focuses on heroin and pills. The Attorney General’s office also revoked controlled substance licenses for negligent doctors and is in favor of expanding the state’s prescription drug monitoring program.

Recent Significant Federal Drug Convictions
On December 20, in Arizona District Court, Michael Rocky Lane was sentenced to 180 months in jail, after being found guilty of two counts of conspiracy to manufacture and distribute a controlled substance analogue and one count of possession with the intent to distribute a controlled substance analogue. Lane was one of the lead sales personnel at an organization that manufactured a bath salt that contained an analogue of methcathinone. When that analogue was temporarily scheduled as a Schedule I controlled substance, Lane used replacement chemicals to develop additional analogues. In all, Lane’s companies made millions of dollars manufacturing and selling multiple versions of synthetic drugs.

David Kwiatkowski was sentenced to 39 years in prison, after pleading guilty to obtaining controlled substances by fraud and tampering with a consumer product. Kwiatkowski was a former New Hampshire hospital technician who, while aware that he was infected with Hepatitis C, injected himself with syringes of pain killers that were later used on patients. As a result of Kwiatkowski’s actions, 45 patients were infected by the disease. More than 12,000 patients were tested in multiple states, including Kansas, Maryland, Georgia and New Hampshire.

Hot Topics Relating to Marijuana and Synthetic Cannabinoids
Colorado has introduced a new system, called the Marijuana Inventory Tracking System, that will track all legally grown or produced marijuana from “seed to sale.” Both state officials and those in the marijuana business will be able to access the data.
A botanist in Connecticut is working to develop a process that will detect contaminants in marijuana through DNA profiling and analysis. Recent studies have shown the presence of mold, E. Coli, and pesticides on marijuana.

*The Denver Post* published a Guest Commentary by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Director R. Gil Kerlikowske. Director Kerlikowske wrote about the need for per-se drugged driving laws, relying on studies that have shown that people who drive after using marijuana are at a higher risk for a fatal car crash than the general population. Director Kerlikowske also cited data released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration which showed that younger drivers are significantly vulnerable to the dangers of drugged driving.

The Department of Defense will now expand its random drug testing of service members to include synthetic marijuana. The Department of Defense has a zero tolerance policy for the use of illicit drugs, and considers synthetic marijuana to be a “serious health concern.”

**Recent Studies Relating to Drug Abuse**

According to a report released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Ecstasy-related emergency department visits have increased by 128% for individuals under 21 from 2005 through 2011.

The National Institutes of Health released the results of the annual Monitoring the Future survey, which polls more than 40,000 students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. The survey results indicate that while fewer teens are using synthetic drugs, fewer teenagers believe that marijuana is a dangerous drug. In fact, marijuana use among teenagers has increased, while tobacco use has decreased. The DEA released a statement relating to the study, indicating its concern with the increased use of marijuana among teenagers.

The Pain Journal Online website published the findings of a survey of thousands of opioid addicts. The findings showed that the two most popular opioids among abusers were Oxycodone and Hydrocodone. Oxycodone was favored by young, risk-adult males for the quality of the high it provides, while the elderly and risk-adverse women preferred Hydrocodone, which is cheaper and readily available.

**Other News of Interest**

GlaxoSmithKline will no longer pay doctors to speak on its behalf at conferences and meetings and will no longer tie compensation of sales representatives to the number of prescriptions doctors write. It appears that GlaxoSmithKline is the first major drug company to make such changes to its practices.

The cleaning of homes that were formerly used as methamphetamine labs has become a growing industry. Many of these homes are badly damaged and are a public safety concern to the communities in which they are located. However, there is little oversight in this field, which is leading some companies to cut corners.

The American College of Physicians (ACP) released a policy paper in which it outlines ten recommendations relating to the prescription drug abuse epidemic. The ACP advocates prescriber and patient education, the establishment of a national prescription drug monitoring system, and the development of non-binding guidelines for physicians. A full copy of the policy paper can be accessed using this link.

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