Substance Abuse News

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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Updates in Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs)
Through the use of Florida’s PDMP database authorities have been able to prevent patients from “doctor shopping.” In the cited article, the defendant was arrested after 37 different doctors prescribed him Oxycodone between January 2011 and June 2013. In July, Georgia implemented its PDMP. Authorities predict that the program will “significantly decrease” the number of individuals who visit the state for easy access to prescription medication, and pharmacists have already found instances of potential drug abuse through the use of the system.

Purdue Pharma Maintains Database of Reckless Doctors
The Los Angeles Times published an article detailing Purdue Pharma’s investigation of doctors who recklessly prescribe OxyContin, which is manufactured by that company. The list is confidential. The article noted that, while the company has a database of over 1,800 doctors, the company has only alerted law enforcement to approximately 8% of the prescribers.

New Legislation to Combat Prescription Drug Abuse
Alabama Governor Robert Bentley recently signed three bills into law that were aimed at combatting prescription drug abuse. House Bill 150, which has been in effect since May, improves the state’s prescription drug monitoring program and allows the Medicaid Agency the ability to access the database to determine the prescription drug use of Medicaid recipients. House Bill 151, which went into effect on August 1, implements more stringent regulations of pain management clinics. For example, owners of the clinics must be either Alabama-licensed doctors or businesses that have been registered with the Alabama Secretary of State. House Bill 152 also went into effect on August 1. This bill imposes criminal penalties for patients who obtain prescription pills by “deceptively concealing from a doctor that he or she had received the same or similar prescription drugs from another physician during a concurrent period of time.”

Increase in Heroin Use Throughout the Country
The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times each reported that heroin use has been increasing throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, Utah law enforcement authorities recently announced the largest heroin bust in Utah’s history. The 2012 Overdose Fatality Report recently issued by the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy showed that in 2012, while overdose fatalities declined overall, overdose deaths attributed to the use of heroin increased 550% from the previous year.

Law Enforcement Investigating Overdose Deaths as Homicides
ABC News reported that many state and federal authorities are working to charge street level drug dealers in connection with the deaths of individuals who overdosed on the drugs that the dealers sold. Investigators in states like New Jersey,
Minnesota, Kentucky and Oregon are now investigating overdose deaths in the same manner as they investigate homicides.

**Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome**
Hospitals and non-profit groups are developing new programs to combat Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). For example, hospitals in Wisconsin are partnering with the Vermont Oxford Network to determine the best way to treat newborns with NAS. In Indiana, the Delaware County chapter of Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) is addressing the problem of prescription drug abuse among pregnant woman by conducting educational presentations throughout East Central Indiana, with help from the Attorney General’s Office and Purdue University.

**“Designer Drugs”**
The National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) is researching steps taken by states in order to combat the increase of “designer drugs,” or synthetic versions of illegal drugs, such as bath salts and synthetic marijuana. NAAG has recently obtained court documents filed by the New York County Attorney General seeking injunctions against companies selling such substances within New York State. Attorneys who have information relating to steps taken in his or her state, or who would like to view the New York documents, should contact Francesca Liquori, Program Counsel for the National Attorneys General Training and Research Institute, via email at fliquori@naag.org.

Francesca Liquori is the Editor of Substance Abuse News and may be reached at 202-326-6041. Substance Abuse News is a publication of the National Association of Attorneys General.