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 2014

New Developments in Combatting Opioid Abuse
Arizona Attorney General Tom Horne has provided citizens of La Paz county with their first secured prescription drop box. It was sponsored by local law enforcement and a local community group.

Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens announced the winners of his “We’re Not Gonna Take It” prescription drug abuse awareness video contest. The videos encourage young people to lead a healthy life by rejecting prescription drug abuse. The videos will be aired on television stations throughout the state through a partnership with the Georgia Broadcasters Association and the Healthcare Distribution Management Association. To see the winning video and the runner-up, click on the following link.

Acting New Jersey Attorney General John Hoffman announced that the New Jersey Board of Medical Examiners has revoked the license of a neurologist who “acted as a drug dealer” by prescribing opioid pain medication to patients who he did not even examine. The doctor was arrested pursuant to a 2009 investigation and has already pleaded guilty in connection with that case.

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine announced that arrests have been made in connection with a joint state and federal task force investigation called Operation Safety Net. The two suspects who were arrested have been charged with creating and selling dozens of forged opioid painkiller prescriptions.

Recently, authorities have seized pills that were manufactured to resemble OxyContin but contain heroin. The pills are called “Mexican Oxy,” and are manufactured by Mexican drug cartels. Manufacturing counterfeit OxyContin in this manner is quite profitable, as heroin is much cheaper than oxycodone. The federal prosecutor who handled the case called it “unique” but pointed out that the existence of these pills shows that “the cartels are able to move into whatever illegal market they find.”

Collaboration between Colorado state and federal authorities has resulted in a takedown of a Denver black tar heroin trafficking ring, which had ties to Mexico. Fifty arrests were made in connection with the investigation and a large amount of contraband was seized, including over 23 pounds of heroin, four firearms, and $300,000.

A Missouri state legislator is planning to re-introduce a bill that will authorize the development of a prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) in the state. Missouri is the only state in the nation that
does not have an operable PDMP. The prospective bill would grant access to the PDMP to doctors and pharmacists. Law enforcement would be required to seek a warrant to access the PDMP.

The U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance has awarded Kentucky a $400,000 grant which will be used to “develop data-driven, multidisciplinary approaches to reduce prescription drug abuse and overdoses” in the state. Public health agencies and law enforcement will collaborate in this development, through the establishment of an Action Team, which will examine data to identify regions most at risk and develop “risk mitigation activities.”

U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer (NY) proposed a $100 million “heroin surge.” Specifically, Senator Schumer is requesting a $100 million emergency appropriation to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program to combat a heroin pipeline which runs from Canada into Vermont and New York City and eventually down to the Capital Region.

This article details the ongoing federal investigation into the NFL’s prescription drug practices and includes accounts from players who allege that their former teams and team physicians liberally distributed prescription painkillers, often without informing the players of the dangerous side effects.

As reported in the November Substance Abuse Newsletter, a recent CDC report showed that, from 1999 to 2012, opioid related drug overdoses in the United States have doubled from 6.1 per 100,000 people to 13.1 per 100,000 people. This article provides additional information regarding the steps that the CDC is taking to reduce opioid abuse in the country, from recommending the use of PDMPs and evidence based prescribing practices to filing a lawsuit against certain pharmaceutical companies that they allege have engaged in deceptive marketing practices.

The American Academy of Neurology (AAN) released a position statement which argues that the risks associated with prescription opioid use outweighs the benefits for treating chronic non-cancer pain. The AAN has based its position in part on the increase in drug overdoses over the past ten years and an underappreciated longer-term physical dependence risk. The statement also included a list of best practices for the use of opioids.

Researchers are making progress in the development of non-addictive opioid painkillers. One pill, currently in development at Cara Therapeutics, attaches to different nerve-ending receptors than do typical opioid pain killers. The company plans to submit an intravenous version of the drug to the FDA for approval in 2016 and to submit a tablet version to the FDA in 2017.

This article compares the demographics of heroin abusers today with those from the last epidemic and details some of the causes of the current resurgence in use. It also explains the causes for the surge of Mexican heroin into the United States and the effect that this surge has had on the cost and type of heroin commonly abused in America.

Zogenix, the manufacturer of Zohydro, and Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of OxyContin, recently entered into an agreement regarding the sale of extended release pure hydrocodone painkillers. Zohydro is an extended release hydrocodone drug that does not contain acetaminophen. Purdue plans on releasing a similar drug, Hysingla, which was approved by the FDA this month (see below). Under the deal, each corporation waives regulatory exclusivity on the other’s
extended-release hydrocodone products, paving the way for Purdue to release Hysingla. Purdue will pay Zogenix $10 million pursuant to the deal.

The FDA has also approved Hysingla ER (hydrocodone bitartrate), which is an extended release opioid analgesic. The drug is approved for the treatment of pain severe enough to require daily, around-the-clock, long-term opioid treatment and for which alternative treatment options are inadequate. The drug has abuse-deterrent properties, which are detailed in the FDA’s press release.

This article details how Insys Therapeutics, the manufacturer of a narcotic painkiller called Subsys, paid doctors whose prescribing practices were being investigated by state medical boards to promote the use of the drug.

The World Health Organization has recommended that Naloxone be made widely available. It estimates that expanding the availability of this drug might prevent more than 20,000 overdose deaths in the United States each year. However, police departments that have recently implemented Naloxone programs have found that the costs related to the nasal spray version of the drug have increased drastically (in some cases, by more than 50%). This may lead to decreased access to the drug. The manufacturer of the most commonly used form of the drug, Amphastar, has stated that “manufacturing costs have increased on an annual basis,” while a representative of Hospira, another manufacturer, stated that its version of the drug costs “on average about the cost of a large pizza.”

Synthetic Drug News
Recently, Senate Bill 199 was introduced to the Texas state legislature. If enacted, the legislation would prohibit the use and sale of synthetic drugs. The bill includes a “catch all provision” for drugs that either have a similar chemical composition to scheduled drugs or produce substantially similar effects to scheduled drugs.

New Efforts in the Fight Against Methamphetamine
The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) of the U.S. Department of Justice awarded Oklahoma a grant that will be used to fund law enforcement training in the area of methamphetamine interdiction. Specifically, law enforcement will be trained on how to use an online database to track methamphetamine usage and what steps to take when children are found in a home where methamphetamine is manufactured. Nine other states will receive this grant as well.

Law enforcement is reporting a rise in the presence of liquid methamphetamine in Texas, which has led to lower prices for the drug. The liquid version of the drug is easily concealable and transportable and can be converted to crystal or powder.

Updates in the Field of Marijuana Legalization
This November, residents of Washington D.C. voted to legalize marijuana. However, legalization is still subject to the approval of the U.S. Congress. This article details the approval process while this article details the views of law enforcement and law makers in Washington D.C. and the surrounding jurisdictions. Moreover, approval of the legalization may violate international treaties, according to a recent report issued by the Congressional Research Service.
This article details the most recently adopted marijuana legalization statutes by jurisdiction. As detailed in the article, 23 states and Washington D.C. have legalized medical marijuana and 17 jurisdictions have moved to decriminalize the drug in some fashion.

School administrators in Colorado have reported incidents of high school students ingesting marijuana oil during classes through the use of vapor pens. Marijuana oil capsules are placed in the pens. Students can then discreetly inhale the substance in class.

According to a recent Gallup Poll, the percentage of Americans who support marijuana legalization has decreased over the past year, from 58 percent to 51 percent. The strongest support for legalization can be found on the West Coast and the Northeast.

Colorado’s Division of Financial Services has issued its first marijuana credit union charter, which established the Fourth Corner Credit Union. The institution must be approved by the National Credit Union Administration. That approval process can take up to two years, but the institution can operate during the Administration’s decision process.

This article addresses the question of what it would take to “build a Marlboro of marijuana,” noting that current regulations are the biggest reason for the lack of “Big Marijuana” within Colorado.

**Drugged Driving**

Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway has announced that his office will host a training for law enforcement and prosecutors regarding the effective prosecution of DUI cases. The training is entitled “Protecting Lives, Saving Futures,” and is funded through the Kentucky Office of Highway Safety with grant funds provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Many stakeholders will attend the latest training, including representatives from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). General Conway has also been named a 2014 recipient of a Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility (FAAR) Leadership Award in connection with the work that he has done to prevent underage drinking and impaired driving.

The Michigan legislature has enacted a new law, Public Act 315, which allows drugged driving offenses to be punished and electronically recorded in the same manner as drunk driving offenses. Michigan police officers are undergoing training which will enable them to determine when an individual is impaired by the use of drugs.

**Other News of Interest**

Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi announced that thirteen people have been arrested in connection with a drug trafficking conspiracy investigation conducted by state and federal law enforcement. Over the course of the investigation, more than 13 kilograms of cocaine were seized. The defendants allegedly conspired to traffic approximately 30 kilograms of cocaine.

The American Psychological Association has recently published research which indicates that “teens prescribed anti-anxiety or sleep medications may be up to 12 times more likely to abuse those drugs
illegally than teens who have never received a prescription.” The underlying study included close to 3,000 students in middle school or high school.

A recent survey of 1,600 college students, sponsored by the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, found that almost 20% of college students abuse prescription stimulants such as Ritalin, Adderall and Vyvanse.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office has recently released a report entitled “MEDICARE PROGRAM INTEGRITY: CMS Pursues Many Practices to Address Prescription Drug Fraud, Waste and Abuse. It can be accessed by clicking on this link.

This month, a number of NAAG’s Visiting Fellows attended events in Washington, D.C. related to drug abuse. Please see below for a full listing of events attended. If you are interested in obtaining the documents distributed or notes taken at the events, please contact me at fliquori@naag.org.

Events attended:
- March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation Congressional Briefing – “Drug Exposure in Mothers and Newborns: Addressing Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome”
- National Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Policy Meeting (hosted by the Center for Lawful Access and Abuse Deterrence)

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. Any use and/or copies of this newsletter in whole or part must include the customary bibliographic citation. NAAG retains copyright and all other intellectual property rights in the material presented in this publication.

NAAG, 2030 M Street, NW, Eighth Floor, Washington, DC 20036
(202) 326-6000 | http://www.naag.org/