Pill for Ills, not Thrills
Working to stop pill shopping scams

Prescription drug abuse is the nation’s fastest-growing drug problem and as been classified an epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In a November 2011, press release, the CDC reported the death toll from overdoses of prescription painkillers has more than tripled in the past decade.

The Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED) and county medical societies like Lancaster City & County, are working to do something about this. The newly launched Pills for Ills, not Thrills campaign, the goal is to enact legislation that would create a statewide controlled substance database (CSDB). Lives could be saved, possible criminal activity could be exposed, and best of all, if done right there’s no downside.

But it needs to be done properly. A provision allowing law enforcement officials to surf unfettered through patient records without any semblance of probable cause would be unacceptable. Likewise, a mandate forcing physicians to access the database, even when they are absolutely certain there is no reason in a particular case, would turn a useful tool into a major administrative burden, and be a deal breaker.

The ability to access a controlled substance database to help identify pill scammers is a reality for physicians in many states, but not in Pennsylvania. Prior to writing a prescription for a controlled substance, doctors in many other states can determine if the person sitting in the exam room has already received narcotics from another agency or pharmacy.

PAMED and county medical societies are currently pressing for legislation that would allow Pennsylvania physicians to have the same ability. The proposed database could only be accessed by authorized persons for medical purposes or by law enforcement only in cases where they have probable cause.

As part the Pills for Ills, not Thrills campaign, PAMED has developed a reference book available to physicians. The booklet is available for free at Ever Been Scammed?

If your patient was abusing prescription or illicit drugs, would you know?

In 2011, 3.1 million persons aged 12 or older reported using an illicit drug for the first time within the prior 12 months. This averages to approximately 8,500 initiates per day. Additionally, 6.1 million persons aged 12 years or older reported the non-medical use of prescription psychotherapeutic drugs in the prior month.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health, has developed NIDAMED, a portfolio of resources to help clinicians better address drug abuse in their patients. The portfolio includes the NIDA Drug Use Screening Tool—with both a one question quick screen and a full interactive screen—information guides on brief intervention and referral to treatment, and two new Medscape CMEs. NIDAMED also includes patient materials and a variety of faculty-developed curriculum resources designed for medical students, residents, and faculty.
All resources are science-based and available free of charge. If you have questions about any of the NIDAMED resources, contact nidacoeteam@jbsinternational.com.