



The Florida Academy of **PAIN MEDICINE** Integration & Innovation

The Florida Academy of Pain Medicine is proud of the role our board and members have played in the development of effective policies that have contributed to the decline of "pill mills" in the state of Florida. Over the past four years our lobbyists, presidents, staff members and our affiliate medical societies have worked tirelessly to see these policies implemented to the fullest extent of the law.

Our congratulations to every physician and organization that stepped up to the task that made these changes happen.

[EDITORIAL]

Florida's Effective Policies: Pill Mill Crackdown Pays Off

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Florida, once labeled "the pill mill capital of the country," has shown that it's ready to relinquish that title.

A report last week by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that changes in Florida policies and law enforcement have led to what appears to be "the first documented substantial decline in drug overdose mortality in any state during the past 10 years."

The CDC noted that from 2010 to 2012, the death rates from prescription drugs fell 23 percent in Florida. The number of overdose deaths from oxycodone, one of the most widely abused prescription drugs, declined by 52 percent.

By contrast, from 2003 to 2009, the number of Florida deaths caused by drug overdose increased 61 percent, with the largest increases caused by oxycodone.

Along with deaths, prescriptions for powerful painkillers like oxycodone and other abused drugs also have decreased. The CDC report pointed out that in 2010, Florida had 98 of the 100 U.S. doctors who prescribed the highest quantities of oxycodone; today it has none.

The report highlights the fact that Florida policy changes -such as requiring pain clinics to register with the state and establishing a prescription-drug database -helped lead to the decline in drug-overdose deaths and suggests other states follow suit.

'Policies and enforcement work'

Credit for Florida's turnaround should go to legislators and law enforcement officials, including Attorney General Pam Bondi, who fought for the policy changes and funding that initially were opposed by Gov. Rick Scott and legislative leaders.

The CDC report acknowledged that factors other than policy changes and enforcement of new laws might have contributed to the decline. It notes, for example, that a reformulation of oxycodone in late 2010 made it more resistant to abuse and that some former prescription-drug abusers switched to illegal drugs such as heroin.

But the report points out that most of the decline in oxycodone deaths and prescribing occurred after 2011, and that the rise in heroin-related deaths was minuscule compared with the decline in deaths from opioid analgesics such as oxycodone. "This tells us that policies and enforcement work," Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the CDC told The New York Times. "This is an epidemic that was caused largely by inappropriate prescribing, and it can be fixed to a significant extent by improving prescribing."

The CDC report suggests that other states could learn from Florida's success. As the Times noted, "The national rate of prescription drug deaths remained persistently high through 2011, the most recent year for which there is national data."

Still on guard

Despite its progress, Florida can't afford to let its guard down. Locally, Polk County Sheriffs Office detectives have made several high-profile arrests of a clinic owner, "pain" doctors and pharmacists in Winter Haven and Lakeland. "We are not out of the woods yet," Sheriff Grady Judd said in reference to the pain-pill abuse problem. "We did not have the problem like some large cities in Florida, but we can't afford to be complacent. " The Sheriffs Office says its narcotics investigations unit monitors the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program that identifies three types of potential prescription pain-medication abusers: Individuals who obtain separate pain medication prescriptions from multiple doctors over a short period of time (doctor shopping). Doctors who write an unusually high number of pain prescriptions. Pharmacists who dispense unusually high numbers of pain medications.

As law enforcement works to arrest those abusing narcotics, they -along with state regulators -also must take care not to unnecessarily impede legal access to painkillers and other drugs that are vital to the patients who use them. And with the ability to monitor the dispersal of certain prescriptions comes the responsibility to protect patients' privacy and civil rights.

Still, Florida should be proud that it has now taken the lead in stemming the illegal flow of powerful prescription drugs and the needless deaths that it causes. It's quite an accomplishment to go, in the space of a few years, from pill-mill pariah to drug-policy paragon.

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