



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

November 12, 2008

TO: Washington State Board of Health Members

FROM: Dr. Diana Yu, SBOH Member

SUBJECT: EDUCATIONAL BRIEFING ON OPIOID MISUSE AND ABUSE

Background and Summary

The use of prescription opioids to manage pain has steadily increased across the country since the 1990s. Much of this medication is being used to treat chronic pain – one national survey reported that about a quarter of adults reported that pain interfered with their normal work in the past month. However, there are also some public health concerns as there is mounting evidence of (a) an increase in non-medical use of pain relievers, (b) addiction to opioids which is now believed to be up to 18% of all users of prescribed opioids, and (c) a dramatic increase in accidental overdoses related to prescription opiates.

Opioid misuse and abuse affects all age groups, but young people are particularly susceptible. Data from National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicates that 18–25-year-olds have the highest percentage of non-medical use of prescription painkillers. According to the Washington State 2006 Healthy Youth Survey, 10% of 10th graders and 12% of 12th graders used a painkiller to get high in the past 30 days. Deaths from unintentional poisoning (which includes drug overdose) in Washington are increasing for all age groups and now surpass deaths due to motor vehicle crashes for those between 25-64 years of age.

I have been concerned about these statistics for some time. I think that the Board needs to have an in-depth understanding of this serious public health problem. I asked staff to organize an educational session to help us understand the scope of this problem and to get a flavor of some of activities being carried out to address it. Clearly, public health can play a role in educating patients, families, and health care providers on how to prevent unintentional morbidity and mortality associated with prescription opiates.

Today we have invited five members of the Prescription Opiate Morbidity and Mortality Prevention Workgroup to present to us. A copy of the group's draft charter and membership is included in your packets.

Recommended Board Action

None.