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COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG
POLICY AND HUMAN RESOURCES

INVESTIGATIVE HEARING TITLED

“TO DO NO HARM: STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING
PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE”

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

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Substantial quantities of prescription drugs are being illegally diverted in Florida. This results in death (36% of 9,116 “drug deaths” in 2002, or 2,324 people), it fuels the disease of addiction (a 120% increase in treatment center admissions over the past two years for prescription opiates) and consumes state resources through associated medical expenses, Medicaid fraud, and treatment expenses. Prescription diversion involves many scenarios – prescription fraud, illegal resale of prescriptions, theft, “doctor shopping”, “pharmacy shopping”, and loose prescribing by practitioners characterized by the “D’s”

- Duped – by patients seeking drugs
- Dishonest – “prescription mills” or “pill doctors”
- Dated – in their knowledge of appropriate uses of controlled substances
- Dysfunctional – can’t say no to patients
- Disabled – by their own substance “abuse”

Prescription drugs have overshadowed “street drugs” in several categories:

- In 2002, benzodiazapines accounted for more overdose deaths than cocaine (1625 v. 1307)
- In 2002, oxycodone, hydrocodone, methadone, and benzodiazapines individually were involved in more overdose deaths than heroin

The problem is getting worse and there are abundant laws to deal with perpetrators of prescription diversion. However, it remains needlessly complicated to identify who these people are in the State of Florida.

If I am trying to care for a patient that I suspect has a problem with prescription drugs, I have to spend hours on the telephone calling each of numerous pharmacies, assuming the patient is using their own name and that they are using local pharmacies. Even when patients reveal names of practitioners that are easy sources of prescriptions, it remains a daunting task to investigate these prescribers.

Fifteen other states currently have prescription monitoring systems. In 2002 a GAO report described their effectiveness in reducing diversion, by reducing inappropriate prescribing, by serving as a deterrent for doctor shopping and by reducing resources expending on investigations.

“The Florida Prescription Validation Program” would:

- Establish an electronic database containing recent prescriptions of patients over the age of 16
- Make this information available to physicians, pharmacists, medical QA personnel, and law enforcement

- Set requirements for reducing prescription fraud
 - Require quantities to be written out
 - Require picture ID to pick up prescriptions
 - Recommend use of counterfeit prescription forms
- Be administered by the Department of Health

Funding: Florida's agreement with Purdue Pharma provides the state with \$2million for development of software to implement the program. Florida has received \$300,000 from the Department of Justice to establish the program.