

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Prescription Monitoring Program Enhancement

One of the priorities identified by the Criminal Justice Improvement Committee for the upcoming grant cycle addresses the diversion and misuse of prescription drugs. The 2010 National Survey of Drug Use and Health indicates that more than 7 million persons aged 12 and older had used psychotherapeutic prescription-type drugs for non-medical reasons in the month prior to the survey. While non-medical prescription drug abuse declined for the 12 to 17 age group, from 4.0 percent in 2009 to 3.0 percent in 2010, the rate for the population aged 18 to 25 was 5.9 percent. For the group aged 12 and older, 55 percent obtained prescription drugs from a friend or relative for free; 17.6 percent obtained medications from a physician. Only 4.4 percent indicated that they obtained prescription-type drugs from a drug dealer and less than one percent obtained their prescription medications online. The National Institute on Drug Abuse indicated that in 2009, approximately 4.6 million emergency room visits were drug related. Of those, approximately 2.1 million were related to drug abuse; 27.1 percent of those visits were related to the nonmedical use of prescription drugs.



One of the 13 Operation Medicine Drop locations was held at Pitt Memorial Hospital in Greenville.

The Problem

The Pitt County Sheriff's Office noted an increasing trend in the diversion and abuse of prescription drugs over the past six years. The office developed a strategy to address prescription fraud and, at the same time, focus on the illicit use of prescription drugs. Through the use of both enforcement and prevention, they created a program to decrease the diversion of prescription medications, prescription fraud and to increase community awareness of the dangers of the misuse of prescription drugs.

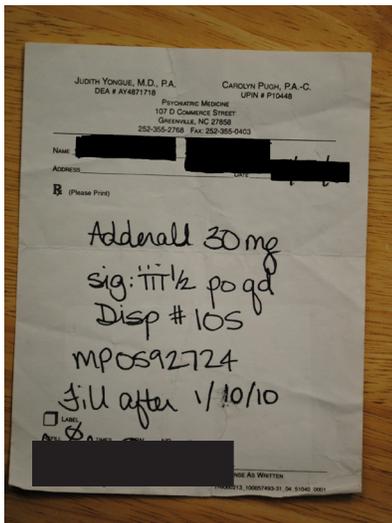
The Grant

The Pitt County Sheriff's Office applied for a grant to fund an investigator to strengthen local law enforcement efforts to control prescription fraud and diversion. Since being hired, Detective Tyler Bryan has established an effective working relationship with area pharmacists and doctors. Pharmacists contact him when they receive what they believe to be a fraudulent prescription. He, in turn, notifies other area pharmacies to make them aware of the fraudulent activity and to track attempts to use the fraudulent prescription at other locations.



Detective Bryan is also actively involved in raising community awareness of the problem by working with the Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America to disseminate information in the community. Together they are working with their local legislative representative to gain access to the

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The above prescription, received by the Pitt County Sheriff's Office from a local pharmacist, had the 'fill-after' date and the number of pills to be dispensed altered.

statewide controlled substance database in order to be able to track offenders as they use different pharmacies. Operation Medicine Cabinet concentrates on providing citizens with a safe way to dispose of unused or expired medications through the use of a drop box placed in the Sheriff's lobby in the county courthouse.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goals of the grant were to decrease prescription fraud by increasing the number of investigations and arrests and to increase public awareness of prescription abuse and reduce the availability or accessibility of prescription drugs in the home for potential misuse. The objectives of the grant included:

- Providing additional manpower to assist in the investigation of cases of prescription fraud and diversion
- Reducing the illicit use of prescription drugs by teenagers
- Reducing the availability and potential illicit use of prescription drugs
- Increasing the awareness of the abuse of prescription drugs by teens to both parents and school staff members.
- Strengthening case leads and reducing the time spent reviewing pharmacy records by obtaining access to the controlled substance statewide database and prescription profile
- Establishing and maintaining working relationships with pharmacies, the State Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the N.C. Medical Board, the N.C. Nursing Board and the N.C. Pharmacy Board.



Partnering with the Safe Kids Coalition and Pitt County Memorial Hospital, at two separate events the sheriff's office collected more than 105 pounds of prescription drugs, including medications dispensed as far back as 1967.

Community Involvement

Detective Bryan has been actively involved in outreach efforts in Pitt County. By partnering with North Carolina Safe Kids, he has been able to promote the statewide initiative to remove potentially dangerous drugs from homes in the area. He also works with area school counselors to keep them informed about issues specifically related to teens, such as the more popular drugs used and characteristics of drug users.

'Operation Medicine Drop' has proven to be extremely successful. More than 144,000 dosage units of medication were collected in 13 separate 'Take Back' events across the county. One of the more successful events took place at the Council on Aging, where more than 15,000 units were picked up. Some of the medications picked up at this event were more than 20 years old. One prescription dated back to the 1960s.

Investigators also work with members of community agencies, including the Safe Communities Coalition of Pitt County, home healthcare workers, hospice workers and environmental advocates. This group, working as a team, proposed the idea of a drop-box for collecting unused or expired medications. One was installed in the front lobby of the Pitt County Courthouse in December 2010. As of August 2011,

more than 166 pounds of medications have been collected and properly disposed of according to state and federal guidelines. The Sheriff's Office has developed a guide to provide information to other agencies on procedures and guidelines for installing drop-boxes for prescription medications. There are now 14 medication drop-boxes installed across the state.

Program Evaluation

Since hiring Detective Bryan as investigator, the Pitt County Sheriff's Office has noted a decline in the number of prescription fraud cases. The relationships he has established with area pharmacists and the information shared has contributed to this decline. Prescription forgery has advanced from an offender simply altering the number of pills to be dispensed. Forged prescriptions have been seized that were scanned to a computer and altered to produce a clean blank that the forger could fill in with any medication and amount. In one case, 26 prescriptions were identified that had been used over a two year period. Another case involved the forgery of approximately 90 prescriptions in four years. With the support of Detective Bryan, pharmacists have become more skilled at identifying forged prescriptions.

The success in handling forged prescriptions has allowed Detective Bryan to expand his investigations to patients who 'doctor shop' in order to receive multiple prescriptions from area physicians. Many patients who use this method to obtain prescriptions have legitimate needs for medication, but because they have used them for extended periods of time, they have become addicted to the medication. By working with both doctors and pharmacists, more doctor shoppers are being identified. When these individuals are identified and confronted, they are urged to see substance abuse treatment before they are charged with a drug offense. The sheriff's office feels that this approach was successful and the recidivism rate for this group has remained low.

Summary

The problem of prescription drug abuse and diversion has been amplified by recent news reports. Statistical evidence points to the growing problem on the local and the national level. As a result of having an investigator dedicated to handling prescription drug abuse and diversion, the Pitt County Sheriff's Office has been able to increase local awareness of prescription drug abuse, remove unused medications from local homes and increase cooperation between the sheriff's office, pharmacists and physicians. Through the work of Detective Bryan, the level of prescription forgery has decreased in Pitt County and physicians and pharmacists are now aware of doctor shopping practices and related prescription drug abuse.



A participant drops off a bag of unused and expired medications at the Pamlico/Tar River Foundation Drop-off event held at a local bank, where a total of 9,220 dosage units weighing 30 pounds, were dropped off.

Prescription Monitoring Program Enhancement

GRANT SUMMARY

Area Served: Pitt County

Implementing Agency: Pitt County Sheriff's Office

Project Director: Melissia Larson, Grants Administrator

Funding: Two Year Total: \$ 122,609.08

Federal Funds: \$ 91,956.81; Matching Funds: \$ 30,652.27

Overview: The project investigated cases of prescription fraud and implement initiatives to prevent prescription fraud and abuse in Pitt County.

Accomplishments: During the last grant cycle, grant personnel conducted 25 criminal investigations. Of those cases, 52 percent were cleared by arrest. Nine cases are still being investigated.

Working relationships have been established between pharmacies within Pitt County, the State Bureau of Investigation, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, the N.C. Medical Board, the N.C. Nursing Board and the N.C. Pharmacy Board.

The Sheriff's Office is partnering with Safe Kids of North Carolina, Pitt County Safe Kids, the Pitt County Safe Communities Coalition, the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation as well as with local caregivers, hospice organizations and pharmacies to educate members of the community on the dangers of accidental poisoning and other risks associated with the misuse of prescription drugs.

Grant personnel have seized over 144,000 dosage units of medication at 13 Operation Medicine Drop events across the county in the second year of the grant cycle.

A prescription drug drop-off site was established in a secure location at the Pitt County Courthouse for individuals to drop off expired or unused medications for safe disposal. The Project Director is working on developing a guide to assist other law enforcement agencies across the state in setting up permanent drop boxes.