

HB09-1032

Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. My name is Detective Rhonda Yohn with the Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD), Metro Vice, Narcotics and Intelligence (Metro VNI) Division. I have been a police officer with the CSPD for 17 years and have been assigned to the Metro VNI Division for 10 years. Metro VNI is comprised of law enforcement officers from the CSPD, the EL Paso County Sheriff's Office, the Teller County Sheriff's Office, the Fountain Police Department, and the Woodland Park Police Department and our jurisdiction encompasses El Paso and Teller Counties. We currently have 5 detectives who handle prescription fraud cases. I think it is also important to mention that before I became a police officer, I was a pharmacy technician for 7 ½ years at Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs.

During my service with the Metro VNI Division, I have seen an increase in prescription fraud and controlled substance drug abuse. This is consistent with the national average as approximately 6.4 million people use controlled-substance prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes, with 4.7 million misusing pain relievers (Teens and Prescription Drugs, ONDCP, Feb 2007). For this reason, I approached Representative Liston approximately one year ago and requested his support in presenting a house bill requiring photo identification for schedule II, III, and IV controlled substance prescription medications.

Most prescription fraud involves individuals who have a valid reason to obtain medications but later became addicted, ultimately resulting in abuse. This type of fraud is still prevalent but now more cases are initiated where those who are abusing drugs are also illegally using controlled substance prescription medication, when they have never had a valid prescription or medical reason to do so in the past. Currently, search warrants that have been obtained for methamphetamine and cocaine distribution also yield diverted controlled prescription medications. These controlled medications are usually individual pills of different types, obtained by fraudulent means. More alarming, we are now seeing a rise in teen abuse as well. For example, during an investigation involving several teenagers using and selling heroin, we also discovered fraudulent

prescriptions being passed from a veterinarians' office where one of the teenagers worked.

Nearly 1 in 10 high school seniors admits to abusing powerful prescription pain killers. 40 percent of teens and an almost equal number of their parents think abusing prescription pain killers is safer than abusing "street" drugs (DEA Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse Website). Surprisingly, many people are unaware of the fact that oxycodone (a common prescribed pain killer) is a schedule II controlled substance, the same as cocaine, crack cocaine and methamphetamine.

One common way of obtaining a controlled substance involves a simple phone call to the pharmacy. In order to obtain the controlled substance, individuals will call explaining that they are from a doctor's office and need to call in a prescription for a patient. Or, the Individual will forge a prescription at home on their computer, both often conducted under a false name. These individuals will then use different names at different pharmacies allowing the individual to obtain multiple fraudulent prescriptions in the same week or even the same day. By using various names and pharmacies, the individual does not draw attention to themselves from the Colorado Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (CPDM). I have personally seen suspects use up to 15 different names and multiple pharmacies to obtain anywhere from 50 to 100 fraudulent prescriptions, written for anywhere between 20 and 150 pills.

If an individual is asked to show identification when using a false name to obtain a prescription, based upon my experience, that individual will inform the pharmacist that their identification is in the car and they will leave to get it. Consequently, they will not return, thus preventing the controlled substance from being diverted throughout our communities. In sum, we are simply asking pharmacy employees to check photographic identification of those obtaining schedule II thru IV controlled substance prescriptions. We understand that some individuals can not pick up their own prescriptions and for this reason you can see that the bill presented only asks that the person purchasing the prescription show photographic identification.

There is no doubt that requiring individuals to present photographic identification would reduce drug diversion throughout Colorado. We have already

seen the effectiveness of this technique in regard to the law passed several years ago requiring an individual to present photographic identification when buying pseudoephedrine. Before this law passed, our department saw 100 clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in one year. Last year that number was only 14. Ultimately, if pharmacy employees dedicate a few seconds of their time to checking photographic identification, the effects could provide long lasting protection to the community, where this crime impacts.

HOUSE BILL 09-1032

“Photo ID for Controlled Prescription Drugs”

Good to Know

- Diversion: Improper diversion of prescription drugs occurs via multiples routes, including theft, prescription fraud, exploitation of the Internet, and even criminal medical dispensing. (National Drug Control Strategy, Feb 2007)
- Nearly 7 million Americans are abusing prescription drugs- more than the number who are abusing cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, ecstasy, and inhalants, combined. That 7 million was just 3.8 million in 2000, an 80 percent increase in just 6 years. (DEA Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse Website)
- Opioid painkillers now cause more drug overdose deaths than cocaine and heroin combined. (DEA Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse Website)
- Nearly 1 in 10 high school seniors admits to abusing powerful prescription pain killers. 40 percent of teens and an almost equal number of their parents think abusing prescription painkillers is safer than abusing “street” drugs. (DEA Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse Website)
- 25 percent of drug-related emergency department visits are associated with abuse of prescription drugs. (DEA Fact Sheet: Prescription Drug Abuse Website)
- Teens are turning away from street drugs and using prescription drugs to get high. New users of prescription drugs have caught up with new users of marijuana. (Teens and Prescription Drugs, ONDCP, Feb 2007)
- Next to Marijuana, the most common illegal drug teens are using to get high are prescription medications. (Teens and Prescription Drugs, ONDCP, Feb 2007)
- For the first time, there are just as many new abusers (12 and older) of prescription drugs as there are for Marijuana. (SAMHSA, 2006)
- Non-medical use of the prescription drug pain reliever OxyContin has risen- the only category of illicit drug use among youth that has risen between 2002 and 2006. (Teens and Prescription Drugs, ONDCP, Feb 2007)
- Approximately 6.4 million people use controlled-substance prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes, with 4.7 million misusing pain relievers. Nonmedical use of pain relievers among 18- to 25-year-olds increased by 15 percent from 2002 to 2005. Prescription drug abuse led all other drug categories in new initiates in 2004 and 2005. (Teens and Prescription Drugs, ONDCP, Feb 2007)
- The total number of prescription cases are lower this year as compared to last due to the Office of the District Attorney (El Paso County) advising that first time “doctor shopper” offenders be given a verbal warning.
- Based upon experience, an individual attempting to obtain a prescription by fraudulent means will leave the pharmacy when asked for identification (with the excuse that it was left in a vehicle, etc.), rather than risk being caught.
- One pharmacist explained that this bill would keep them from appearing to single out an individual and look like they are “playing favorites”.
- Photo identification is needed in order to purchase alcohol, tobacco, and pseudoephedrine. It only makes sense that an individual should be required to present photo identification when picking up a controlled substance.
- Point of Contact for this information and questions is Detective Rhonda Yohn, Colorado Springs Police Department, Metro Vice, Narcotics and Intelligence Division, at 719-444-7448.