
Drug Diversion and Abuse: CME Collaboration Unites Health Professionals, Law Enforcement

Cmdr John Burke

A recent CME program bringing together health professionals and law enforcement showed the benefit for these professionals of working together in reducing drug diversion.

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Recently, I had the pleasure of seeing something come to fruition that had been planned for some time. As president of the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI), I was able to participate in a continuing medical education (CME) event that involved law enforcement, regulatory agents, and a host of health professionals, including pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and physician assistants. All of these individuals came together with law enforcement to learn more about prescription drug abuse and proper pain management practices.



Diverse Perspectives, Shared Goals

The program was set in Florence, Kentucky, with the CME credits procured by The Hospice of the Bluegrass, with assistance from John Peppin, DO, NADDI's new medical liaison officer and a pain management physician. Significant assistance was provided by several pharmaceutical companies, other industry-related entities, and the prescription-monitoring programs from both Kentucky (KASPER) and Ohio (OARRS). Attendees came from Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and Tennessee.

This CME program stands out in my mind, because hopefully it is a start to a closer collaboration between health professionals and law enforcement. The hope is that we recognize that we are all on the same side, with the ultimate goal of providing uninterrupted medication to those who are in need, which are the vast majority of those prescribed controlled substances.

Overcoming Fears

Over the past few years, some health professionals have developed a fear that law enforcement and regulatory agencies are "out to get them." This is usually the result of a local health professional being arrested with rumors flying—ultimately deemed to be an unjust prosecution that should have never happened. Conversely, some law enforcement officers had mistakenly believed that a significant number of health professionals were involved in unlawful activities.

When prescribers and dispensers of controlled substances become fearful of police oversight, it can cause a negative outcome for the legitimate patient, resulting in the undertreatment of his or her pain. One way we thought to reduce this anxiety was to get both sides together and provide some relevant topics so that all of us could become better informed.

The topics provided were on general pain management practices, diversion issues in the emergency room, finding a balance between pain management and drug diversion, and simplifying methods of investigating health professionals, just to name a few. The program ended with a panel discussion by the presenters that offered some very interesting scenarios and descriptions of how each of the faculty would proceed with the facts at hand. The members of the audience also had a turn in giving their opinion on each of the situations.

Joining Forces

I was encouraged by the positive results that came out of this CME program and was honored to be one of the speakers. The sincere hope is that this is not the last CME collaboration between health professionals and law enforcement, and, if the sentiment of the attendees was any indication, more of these will be coming in the future.

I can assure you that NADDI is ready, willing, and able to assist in providing CME programs across the country that encourage law enforcement and health professional unity toward reducing diversion and, at the same time, safeguarding the needs of legitimate patients.

This is no small task, but it is very doable if we all work together, combine our knowledge and experience, and realize that we both do very serious and important work that requires a joint effort for the best outcomes.