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Volusia County task force: Make prescription database check mandatory

By ANNE GEGGIS, STAFF WRITER



Farmer

DAYTONA BEACH -- Local officials want the pharmacists who put powerful painkillers into patients' hands to be required to check the state's new prescription database for repeated prescriptions -- and say the lack of that mandate is a serious loophole in the new law aimed at curbing Florida's drug epidemic.

A report in Tuesday's News-Journal that pharmacists were required to check the database before dispensing certain controlled drugs had Larry Huguenin's phone jangling all week. Huguenin, a board member of the Volusia-Flagler County Pharmacy Association, told the county's Substance Abuse Task Force on Friday that he had an opinion from the state Pharmacy Board that checking the database is voluntary for both doctors and pharmacists -- not mandatory.

"A lot of pharmacists can't even get on the database at work yet," said Huguenin, who works as a pharmacist at a Winn-Dixie.

Members of the Task Force said they were surprised to hear that -- the information in Tuesday's story had come from State Surgeon General Frank Farmer.

"I can't believe they've developed this database for voluntary compliance," said Mary Swiderski, executive director of the Volusia Council of Governments who helped form the Substance Abuse Task Force. "There has to be something in there (making it mandatory). If not, we need to clear it up ASAP."

Last month, Florida joined 34 other states in having a prescription-drug database to track drugs such as benzodiazepine, hydrocodone, Xanax and oxycodone as a way to shut off the flow of prescription drugs from Florida. The lack of a database is seen as the chief culprit for why the state became a mecca for pill addicts seeking the drugs and unscrupulous doctors willing to write prescriptions regardless of medical condition.

Now, whenever doctors prescribe those drugs and other controlled substances, they are required to enter them into this new database within seven days. Monday, doctors, pharmacists and law enforcement personnel could start looking prescriptions filled in the last six months to see if a patient's history pointed to prescription-drug abuse.

Farmer, an Ormond Beach internal-medicine specialist now heading up the state Health Department, said he misspoke on the current requirements, but he expects that pharmacists will be mandated in future legislation to check the database before dispensing.

"I think the Legislature will try to address that" lack of a mandate, he said. "But I also think that a lot of pharmacists will check things voluntarily."

Mark Jones, chief executive officer of Community Partnership for Children, the local foster-care agency, said he feels strongly that checking should be mandatory: "Otherwise, the monitoring system is useless."

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