



News Release

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Prescription Drug Use Examined in New Utah Report

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) released a landmark report today that researchers believe will improve the health of Utahns by making sure prescription drugs are used appropriately.

Selected Prescription Drug Usage in Utah is the first report of its kind issued by a state health department. The report is based on 2003 pharmacy claims of nearly one million Utah residents, voluntarily submitted by Altius Health Plans, IHC Health Plans, Public Employees Health Program, and the Division of Health Care Financing/Medicaid Program. The claims data establishes a statewide baseline of prescription drug use in ten important areas, high blood pressure or hypertension, diabetes, asthma, hypercholesterolemia, depression and anxiety disorders in pregnancy, adolescent depression, antipsychotics, antibiotics, generic drugs and pain medications.

“Prescription drugs play an important role in maintaining the health of many Utahns,” says LaDene Larsen, Director, Bureau of Health Promotion, UDOH. “This data provides another piece of the puzzle that will help us help Utahns manage their chronic diseases and illnesses.”

One important finding in the report is that nearly half of Utahns who take high blood pressure medications did not receive diuretics, inexpensive drugs that help rid the body of excess water and which are highly effective in treating hypertension and preventing cardiovascular complications. “While Utah rates are similar to national data, this represents an opportunity to improve the treatment of high blood pressure in Utah in a cost-effective manner,” said Dr. Paul Houglund, Physician Program Manager and lead author of the report, Center for Health Data, UDOH.

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Another key finding is that 40 percent of asthma patients receive only those medications designed for short-term relief of symptoms. “Ideally, patients with asthma would be on a regimen of maintenance medications to limit disease progression and lessen the likelihood of asthma attacks,” said Houglund. The report also shows that, when compared to Utahns with other chronic diseases like high cholesterol and hypertension, asthma patients were less compliant when taking long-term control medications.

Because asthma attacks often lead to emergency room visits, the report points out that educating patients and providers may improve the quality of asthma care and keep patients out of the E.R.

“We are excited about the opportunity to see where we as a health plan can direct our patient education efforts better,” said Dr. Dennis Harston, Medical Director, Altius Health Plans.

The report was done as part of a UDOH Health Data Committee initiative to create a statewide pharmacy database, to monitor outpatient illnesses, to improve appropriate uses of prescriptions drugs, to help ensure medication safety, and for other prescription drug-related research projects.

Initiative partners, including health care purchasers, providers, payers, and public health programs have also committed to use the new report to develop community-based patient and provider education programs regarding the appropriate use of prescription drugs, medication safety, and evaluation of quality improvement projects.

For a copy of the report, visit: <http://health.utah.gov/hda/pharmacy/RxIndicators2003.pdf>

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.