

Appendix A: News Releases

July 31, 2007

– News Release –

“New Campaign Aims at Fighting Pain Medication Abuse”



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Tuesday, July 31, 2007

Media Contact:

Tom Hudachko

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New Campaign Aims at Fighting Pain Medication Abuse

Prescription and over-the-counter medications account for majority of overdose deaths

(Salt Lake City) – In 2006, more Utahns died as a result of over-the-counter or prescription drug overdoses than died in automobile crashes. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today announced a partnership with the Utah Attorney General, the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing (DOPL) and the Utah Labor Commission (ULC) to combat the problem and investigate its causes.

Last year, the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME) investigated 476 drug-related deaths, more than any previous year. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths (307) were caused by legal drugs, either prescription or over-the-counter. The average age at death of legal-drug overdose victims was 42 years, with 51 percent being male. There was at least one legal-drug overdose death in 24 of the state's 29 counties. The most common legal drugs associated with fatal overdose were methadone, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and fentanyl. Non-narcotic prescription drugs were also common. Fewer than one-quarter (96) of overdose deaths were caused by illegal drugs.

“Sadly, far too many Utahns are falling victim to the epidemic of prescription pain medication misuse and abuse,” said Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH executive director. “This not only prevents them functioning up to their capacity, but is all too often fatal. As health care professionals and concerned citizens, we must work together to seek solutions that will protect our families, our schools and the public at large from this growing epidemic.”

The Pain Medication Management and Education Bill, sponsored by Rep. Bradley M. Daw and passed by the 2007 Utah Legislature, directs state agencies to develop a program to investigate the causes of, and reduce the deaths and harm from, the misuse and abuse of prescription pain medications.

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Page 2 of 2 – New Campaign Aimed at Fighting Pain Medication Abuse

"I have experienced the tragic effects of prescription drug addiction both from personal acquaintances and from a public health perspective," said Rep. Daw. "I applaud the efforts of everyone involved to educate the medical community and the public at large about the wisest uses of these powerful drugs."

"Prevention is always better than prison," said Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff. "Everyone in law enforcement is working to get information out about the consequences of misusing prescription pain pills."

The state agencies will work cooperatively with one another to accomplish the following:

- Use the Controlled Substances Database, linked to records of the OME and death certificates, to investigate causes and risk factors associated with prescription pain medication-related deaths
- Develop best practice guidelines for health care providers for prescription and use of opiate pain medications
- Educate health care providers on best practices for prescribing opiate pain medications based on treatment guidelines
- Develop educational materials for patients
- Develop a media campaign aimed at the general public

"A recent federal study found Utah leads the nation in the non-medical use of prescription pain medications, with 6.5 percent of people age 12 or over having used these medications without a doctor's order in the past year," said Dr. Alan Colledge of the ULC "Utah employers recognize these significant, worsening trends and are committed to working with the state to help combat the problem."

"We commend the Utah Legislature for supporting state agencies in their fight against prescription drug abuse," said F. David Stanley, DOPL director, "The Controlled Substance Database team looks forward to assisting our state partners with this new program."

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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.

April 30, 2008

– Media Advisory –

“UDOH to Unveil Campaign to Reduce Overdose Deaths”



Media Advisory

For Immediate Release
Wednesday, April 30, 2008
Media Contact: Tom Hudachko
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UDOH to Unveil Campaign to Reduce Prescription Overdose Deaths *Utahns Urged to Use Rx Pain Meds "Only as Directed"*

WHAT: In 2007, unintentional prescription pain medication overdose was the number one cause of injury deaths in Utah, claiming even more lives than motor vehicle crashes. In response to the epidemic, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and its partners will launch a campaign to encourage Utah residents to use their prescription pain medications only as directed.

According to a statewide public opinion survey conducted earlier this year, most Utah residents believe people do not take their prescription pain medications exactly as prescribed by their doctor, even though they associate the dangers of addiction, abuse and overdose with those medications. Even though the misuse of prescription is not usually intentional, the results are often deadly.

WHO: Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH Executive Director
Rep. Bradley Daw, R-Orem
Dr. Robert Rolfs, State Epidemiologist, UDOH
Erin Johnson, Project Coordinator, UDOH
Family members who have been impacted by prescription pain medication abuse

WHEN: Thursday, May 1, 2008
10 a.m.

WHERE: State Capitol Board Room
Salt Lake City, Utah

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May 1, 2008

– News Release –

“Plain & Simple: Use Only as Directed”



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Media Contact:

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Plain and Simple—Use Only As Directed

New campaign targets importance of taking prescription pain meds safely

(Salt Lake City) – In 2006, more Utahns died as a result of unintentional over-the-counter or prescription drug overdoses than died in motor vehicle crashes. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today unveiled a new education campaign meant to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent by 2009.

Over the past few years, the Office of the Medical Examiner (OME) noticed an increasing trend in causes of death among Utah residents - overdoses of prescription painkillers. Officials did some research and determined many of the deaths were due to dosage mistakes or the fact the victims had combined the painkillers with other prescription drugs.

"We have been able to identify some of the reasons these overdoses are occurring," said Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH executive director. "Too many Utahns feel they can self-medicate as a means of managing their pain, so they aren't following the directions given by their healthcare providers. Sadly, this proves fatal in far too many cases."

The campaign slogan, Use Only As Directed, is meant to be clear and concise, assuring that all Utah residents understand what they can do to protect themselves from falling victim to unintentional overdose deaths. As the campaign rolls out, Utah residents will begin to hear radio ads, see television ads, and spot decals and posters at doctor's offices and pharmacies across Utah. The ultimate success of the campaign will be measured based on the reduction in unintentional overdose deaths that takes place in 2009.

In 2006, the OME investigated 476 drug-related deaths, more than any previous year. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths (307) were caused by legal drugs, either prescription or over-the-counter. The average age at death of legal-drug overdose victims was 42 years. Fifty-one percent of those

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Page 2 of 2: Plain and Simple—Use Only As Directed

victims were male. There was at least one legal-drug overdose death in 24 of the state's 29 counties. The most common legal drugs associated with fatal overdose were methadone, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and fentanyl. Non-narcotic prescription drugs were also commonly found. Fewer than one-quarter (96) of overdose deaths were caused by illegal drugs.

The Pain Medication Management and Education Bill, sponsored by Rep. Bradley M. Daw and passed by the 2007 Utah Legislature, directed state agencies to develop a program to investigate the causes of, and reduce the deaths and harm from, the misuse and abuse of prescription pain medications. 'Use Only As Directed' is a major step in accomplishing that legislative directive.

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October 2, 2008

– News Release –

“UDOH, Partners to Look for Clues in Rx Drug Deaths”



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, October 2, 2008

Media Contact:
Tom Hudachko
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UDOH, Partners to Look for Clues in RX Drug Deaths

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is about to begin a first-of-its-kind research project that will take an in-depth look at all fatal drug-related deaths over the next year. The goal is to find out why record numbers of Utahns are dying by prescription drug overdose and use those findings to design prevention efforts. Over the next year, researchers at the Office of the Medical Examiner will conduct as many as 600 interviews with family members of victims of drug overdose deaths.

“We’ll be asking the families critical questions about the victims’ lives prior to their deaths,” said UDOH Executive Director Dr. David Sundwall. “We’ll look at things like whether they were overweight, if they had a history of sleep apnea and any past substance abuse history,” he added. “What we’re hoping to find is whether there is a certain type of person who is more likely to die from a drug overdose.”

The UDOH has support from the Labor Commission, and the Divisions of Occupational and Professional Licensing (DOPL) and Mental Health and Substance Abuse for the project. The partners will collaborate with the University of Utah Intermountain Injury Control Research Center in order to answer questions about two important problems in Utah: the epidemic of prescription-related overdose deaths and a high suicide rate.

“Although we are looking at two separate problems, there is a lot of overlap,” says Douglas Gray, MD, from the University of Utah, “We need this data collected in order to develop viable solutions for these problems.”

-MORE-

Page 2 of 2 -UDOH, Partners to Look for Clues in RX Drug Deaths

More Utahns are dying from unintentional drug overdoses each year than are dying in motor vehicle crashes. In 2007, 317 Utahns died from non-illicit drug-related overdose deaths that were classified as undetermined or accidental.

All the agencies involved in this new study want to help prevent these deaths. “We hope this collaborative effort amongst state agencies will help uncover clues to prevent future prescription drug overdose deaths,” said Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce.

Earlier this year, UDOH, with the support of DOPL, the Labor Commission and the Utah Attorney General’s Office, launched the 'Use Only as Directed' Campaign to educate Utahns about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. The goal of the campaign is to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent by 2009. For more information on the Use Only as Directed campaign please visit www.useonlyasdirected.org.

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October 20, 2008

– Media Advisory –

“Gov. Huntsman Declares Prescription Safety Awareness Week”



Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

Monday, Oct. 20, 2008

Media Contact:

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Gov. Huntsman Declares Prescription Safety Awareness Week

Week to Focus on Urging Utahns to Use Rx Pain Meds Only as Directed

WHAT: In 2007, 317 Utahns died from prescription pain medication overdoses, making it the number one cause of injury deaths in Utah, claiming even more lives than motor vehicle crashes. In response to the epidemic, Gov. Jon Huntsman has declared Oct. 20-26, 2008 as “Prescription Safety Awareness Week” in Utah.

Earlier this year, the Utah Department of Health launched the campaign: “Use Only as Directed” to educate Utahns about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. The goal of the campaign is to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent by 2009. Campaign workers will spend the week distributing information to patients, physicians and pharmacies. For more information visit www.useonlyasdirected.org.

On Thursday evening, the campaign will host a prescription drug forum to raise awareness about the problem.

WHO: Peter Taillac, MD, emergency room physician
Barbara Crouch, Poison Control Center
Sandra Kresser, mother of an overdose victim
Lynnette Wingert, Drug Enforcement Administration

WHEN: Thursday, Oct. 23, 2008
6 p.m.

WHERE: Salt Lake City & County Building, Room 315
451 S. State St.
Salt Lake City, Utah

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November, 19, 2008

– Media Advisory –

“UDOH Seeks Input on Guidelines for Prescribing Pain Meds”



Media Advisory

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2008

Media Contact:

Tom Hudachko

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UDOH Seeks Input on Guidelines for Prescribing Pain Meds

WHAT: As part of its campaign to reduce the number of prescription pain medication overdose deaths in Utah, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) has developed a draft set of clinical guidelines for prescribing opioids. The department is seeking public input on the guidelines through Nov. 30, 2008.

The UDOH developed the guidelines with help from two multi-disciplinary panels of physicians. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide recommendations and tools for physicians to use when prescribing opioids. The UDOH will publish the guidelines and make them available to all Utah physicians in December once public comments have been considered and a final draft has been completed. Although the guidelines will provide recommendations for best practices, they will not be mandated by the State of Utah. For access to the guidelines and instructions on submitting public comment, please visit: <http://health.utah.gov/prescription>.

In 2007, more Utahns (317) died as a result of prescription pain medication overdoses than died in motor vehicle crashes. Last year, UDOH launched the Use Only as Directed campaign to educate Utahns about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. The goal is to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent by 2009. For more information visit www.useonlyasdirected.org.

WHEN: Today through Nov. 30, 2008

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March 26, 2009

– News Release –

“UDOH Finalizes Guidelines for Prescribing Pain Meds”



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, March 26, 2009

Media Contact:
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UDOH Finalizes Guidelines for Prescribing Pain Meds

Utah becomes just the second state to adopt such guidelines

(Salt Lake City) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today released its final draft of clinical guidelines to assist health care providers in safely prescribing pain medications. UDOH developed the guidelines in partnership with two multi-disciplinary panels of physicians as part of an ongoing campaign to reduce the amount of prescription drug overdose deaths. In 2007, the most recent year for which data is available, more Utahns (317) died as a result of prescription pain medication overdoses than died in car crashes.

The guidelines contain a number of recommendations providers may use in their practices to aid in the safe distribution and use of prescription pain meds. Some key recommendations include:

- Alternatives to opioid treatment should be tried before initiating opioid treatment;
- Providers should screen for risk of abuse or addiction before initiating opioid treatment;
- Methadone should only be prescribed by clinicians who are familiar with its risks and appropriate uses, and who are prepared to conduct the necessary, careful monitoring of patients;
- Long-acting opioids should usually not be used to treat acute pain;
- Methadone should rarely, if ever, be used to treat acute pain;
- The patient should be informed of the risks and benefits of opioid treatment.

The guidelines also include more than 20 tools for providers to use in their practice which will help them implement the recommendations. Included are tools for monitoring patients on opioids, tools to screen for risk of opioid-related abnormal behaviors, sample treatment plans, dosing guidelines and other information.

- MORE -

Page 2 of 2: UDOH Finalizes Guidelines for Prescribing Pain Meds

“It’s important for physicians and the public to be aware that these guidelines are recommendations, they are not requirements and they are not laws,” said UDOH Executive Director Dr. David Sundwall. “However, it’s also important to recognize prescription pain medication overdose deaths have reached epidemic proportions in Utah and health care providers bear some responsibility in combating the problem.”

Utah becomes just the second state in the nation to develop guidelines for healthcare professionals to follow when prescribing pain medications for treatment of chronic and acute pain. Prescribing of opioid medications has substantially increased over the past 10-15 years; medications such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, and methadone increased 6-fold from 1997-2002 in Utah.

“Prescription pain medications are an important tool for treating patients with pain,” said UDOH State Epidemiologist Dr. Robert Rolfs. “Our hope is that these guidelines will help physicians better manage their patients’ pain while avoiding some of the potentially very serious risks of these medications.”

Last year, UDOH launched the Use Only as Directed campaign to educate Utahns about the dangers of prescription drug misuse. The goal is to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication overdoses in Utah by 15 percent this year.

The complete set of guidelines is available at www.useonlyasdirected.org.

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June 2, 2009

– News Release –

“State Sees Dip in Rx Drug Deaths in 2008”



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Media Contact:

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State Sees Dip in Rx Drug Deaths in 2008

Overdose remains the most frequent category of cases for Medical Examiner

(Salt Lake City) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today announced the number of deaths associated with prescription drug overdoses in the state decreased by 12.6 percent from 2007 to 2008. The decrease represents 40 fewer deaths during that timeframe. Still, 277 Utahns died in 2008 of what public health officials view as a preventable epidemic

The dip is the largest decrease in non-illicit drug overdose deaths recorded in the Medical Examiner’s database since 1994. Still, deaths due to all drug overdoses (including illicit, non-illicit, and combinations of the two) remained roughly unchanged from 2007. In 2007, the Medical Examiner investigated 528 drug overdose cases, compared to 517 in 2008.

“From what we are seeing on a daily basis, drug overdoses are still the largest single category of cases coming into the Office of the Medical Examiner,” said Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Todd Grey. “This is an ongoing problem that requires continued attention.”

In 2008, at least one non-illicit drug overdose death occurred in 22 of Utah’s 29 counties. Males and females were affected about equally, with females accounting for 48 percent of deaths and males accounting for 52 percent. Pain medications remain the most common type of prescriptions involved in overdose deaths, and were present in 82 percent of the non-illicit drug deaths. They include drugs like oxycodone (such as Oxycontin and Percocet), hydrocodone (such as Lortab and Vicodin) and methadone.

“While we’re happy to see our numerous efforts to educate the public about the potential dangers of prescription pain medications have begun to pay off, we still face a significant challenge in reducing the number of deaths even further,” said UDOH Executive Director Dr. David Sundwall. “I do take comfort, though, in knowing that 40 Utah families didn’t have to go through the pain of losing a loved one because of misuse of prescription pain medications.”

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In May 2008, UDOH launched its *'Use Only as Directed'* campaign with the intention of educating Utah residents about the potential dangers of prescription drugs. The campaign's goal is to reduce the number of unintentional prescription pain medication deaths in Utah by 15 percent by 2009, using 2006 numbers as the benchmark.

The *Use Only as Directed* campaign has developed materials that are used to help the public, patients, doctors, pharmacists and insurers understand the potential dangers of prescription pain medications. The Utah campaign also broke new ground earlier this year with the release of the Utah Clinical Guidelines on Prescribing Opioids for Treatment of Pain, becoming only the second state in the nation to publish such guidelines. The state has received requests for additional information, resources and copies of the Guidelines from 20 states, including Alaska, Minnesota, New York and Washington.

"There have been many people and organizations involved in achieving this reduction in deaths, including local and national efforts," said Dr. Robert Rolfs, UDOH State Epidemiologist. "There is still a lot of work to be done to continue this downward trend, and we hope that the numerous groups across Utah will continue a collaborative effort to encourage our residents to use prescription pain medications only as directed."

Other organizations contributing to this effort include the Utah Department of Human Services through the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, the Zero Deaths campaign, the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing, the Department of Environmental Quality and others. The newly formed Pharmaceutical Drug Crime Project will also be working to increase awareness and reduce prescription drug abuse.

For more information, resources and statistics on prescription pain medications, visit www.UseOnlyAsDirected.org

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