



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

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Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

201 West Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D., Secretary

December 7, 2012

Dear Colleague,

Drug overdose deaths are a major public health problem in Maryland. In 2011, 633 Marylanders died from a drug- or alcohol-related overdose.

We are writing to ask for your help.

Over the past decade, a growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse has led to a significant increase in pharmaceutical-related overdose deaths, often involving opioid analgesics prescribed by a physician. Improved controls over these drugs and improved prescribing practices have been implemented to counter these trends.

In reviewing data for 2012, we have found a decline in fatal overdoses related to prescription opioids – with 15% fewer for the first seven months of the year compared to last year.

However, overdose deaths related to heroin have increased 41% over this same period. Overall, all drug overdose deaths are up by 6%.

One potential explanation is that individuals who are having a harder time obtaining prescription drugs for non-medical use are initiating heroin use. This development, which has been noted in a number of states, requires a coordinated response.

At the state level, we intend to work closely with local coalitions to review data on overdose deaths and develop action plans.

Clinicians can help by:

- Screening for substance abuse disorders and providing a brief intervention. Information on tools to use in clinical practice is available at <http://www.sbirtraining.com/>. If you are interested in learning more, please call your local health department's Treatment Coordinator. You can reach Treatment Coordinators in your county on the website of the Maryland Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration <http://adaa.dhmh.maryland.gov>. The Treatment Coordinators are listed under Quick Links on the right side of the page.

- Referring individuals with substance use disorders to effective treatment, including treatment with counseling and medication. Please contact your local health department's Treatment Coordinator for more information. You can also locate specific providers at this website: <http://adaa.dhmf.maryland.gov/SitePages/ADAA-ResourceDirectory.aspx>
- Considering whether a patient who may be seeking prescription drugs for abuse may be at risk for using heroin and counseling the patient about the dangers of doing so.
- Staying up to date on implementation of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP). The PDMP will give clinicians point-of-care access to their patients' controlled substance prescription history to improve their ability to screen for indicators of prescription drug-related substance use disorders. For more information visit the PDMP webpage at <http://adaa.dhmf.maryland.gov/PDMP/SitePages/Home.aspx>. If you would like to receive email updates about the PDMP, please send an email to [dhmf.pdmp@maryland.gov](mailto:dhmf.pdmp@maryland.gov).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Sincerely,

/s/Gayle Jordan-Randolph, M.D.

Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health and Disabilities, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

/s/Laura Herrera, M.D., M.P.H.

Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

/s/Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D.

Secretary, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene