Drug Diversion: Dealing with the Dilemma.

"America, we have a problem: A pill-popping problem!" To highlight the seriousness, it is reported by the National Center for Health Statistics that prescription drugs were associated with 18,893 drug overdose deaths in 2014\(^1\). This indicates an increase of 16% in one year. Prescription drugs are the cause of the majority of fatal drug overdoses in the U.S., exceeding those attributed to illegal drugs\(^2\). Not surprisingly then, healthcare providers are finding themselves confronting the crime of prescription drug fraud, and drug diversion is a major factor\(^3\). The Trust for America’s Health report defines drug diversion as drug-abusing patients using methods such as forgery, stealing prescription pads, theft of opioids and other drugs, buying from "pill-brokers", medication-trading/sharing and "doctor-shopping" to divert prescription drugs\(^4\).

Tips to protect your patient and practice:

- **Clinically:** Red flag new patients. Perform thorough assessments and use vigilance with persons who may be "doctor-shopping". Ask detailed questions and document the answers. Note that elderly persons and women are at risk—According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), from 1999 to 2010, overdoses from prescription pain relievers in women increased five-fold.\(^5\) In treating patients who have chronic pain, consider utilizing opioid agreements and have informed consent discussions about the risks, benefits and alternatives to prescription pain relievers. Refer patients who are in need of treatment to appropriate care resources and ensure that patients with legitimate complaints of pain receive the proper needed pain relievers.
- **Prescription practices:** Communicate and cooperate with your pharmacist: Develop protocols to help deter prescription fraud.
- **Paper prescribing:**

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**Prescription Monitoring Programs**

Most states have Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMP) with websites to allow prescribers and dispensers to view patient's prescription history. This real-time data helps pharmacists deny or allow dispensing of a drug.

- The **Illinois Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP)**
- **Indiana Prescription Monitoring Program** website.

"10 questions to identify drug-seeking patients"

Note: Not all drug seekers abuse drugs. Many are in the business to sell or transfer controlled substances to others.
Record amount prescribed in both script and Arabic to prevent alteration (thirty, #30).

- Secure prescription pads and keep a minimal number in use at a given time.
- Avoid prescribing large quantities when possible.

**E-prescribing:** Direct access to the pharmacist reduces the risk of drug diversion and medication errors. This requires meeting regulatory requirements.

If you do discover prescription fraud, contact the risk manager at your facility, notify the local police and DEA office. You may also contact Gallagher and we will connect you to your insurance company to discuss the physician-patient relationship and considerations about discharge from care.