B52 Controlled Substance Prescription Drug Evidence Analyzed by State and Local Crime Laboratories in the United States Over a Five-Year Period

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an enhanced understanding of the distribution of prescription drug seizures and diversion of selected pharmaceutical drugs over a five-year period (2001 through 2005) and geographical regions. The presentation will be based on laboratory analysis and drug identification data of narcotic analgesics and benzodiazepines from the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS).

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing a crucial aspect of the extent in which many pharmaceutical drugs are diverted by comparing prescription data to forensic laboratory data. Only with a more comprehensive data collection and analyses by the forensic community can controlled pharmaceutical drug trafficking and availability in the U.S. be more effectively measured.

The non-medical use of controlled substance prescription drugs is a serious and growing problem in the United States that is being aggressively pursued through various initiatives in U.S. national drug control policies. Controlled substance prescription drugs, as a group, represent the second-most commonly abused substance behind marijuana and ahead of drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. From 2001 to 2005, narcotic analgesics and benzodiazepines together represented nearly 5% of all drug items analyzed by state and local crime laboratories in the United States. An estimated 258,048 narcotic analgesic items and 181,384 benzodiazepine drug items were analyzed during this period. The estimated number of prescriptions dispensed per drug item reported in NFLIS for 2001 through 2005 indicates that methadone, diazepam, alprazolam, morphine, and oxycodone had low prescription-to-seizure ratios compared to other drugs, indicating a higher level of diversion. Alprazolam (101,135), hydrocodone (89,554), and oxycodone (85,328 items) were the most commonly reported prescription drugs from 2001 to 2005, representing nearly 63% of narcotic analgesics and benzodiazepines. In 2005, alprazolam was the fifth, hydrocodone was the sixth, and oxycodone was the eighth most common drug reported in NFLIS. Highlighted findings will include the regional findings where in the West, the most prevalent narcotic analgesic, and benzodiazepine drug item identified was hydrocodone (24%), while in the Midwest and South alprazolam was identified as 22% and 27% respectively. In the Northeast, 30% of narcotic analgesics and benzodiazepines were identified as oxycodone. Additional data will show population adjusted regional trends and also depict spatial distribution of controlled substance prescription drug seizures and availability by using Geographic Information System (GIS) display functionality.

Laboratories participating in NFLIS analyze and report on drug evidence secured in law enforcement operations, offering a unique resource for monitoring drug abuse and trafficking, including the diversion of legally manufactured drugs into illegal markets. NFLIS is an important analytical resource for drug policy and can provide timely information on the illicit trafficking of prescribed drugs across the United States.

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