

Report: prescription-tracking database underused

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LOS ANGELES — State officials say they lack the resources to fully utilize a database that tracks prescriptions for other commonly abused drugs.

Budget cuts limit use of the system, known as CURES, which was intended to help physicians and patients were obtaining drugs from multiple providers, the state attorney general's office told the Los Angeles Times (<http://lat.ms/WT41U2>).

California is not among the states that follow federal guidelines to use prescription data to spot signs of doctor abuse and help prevent overdoses, according to the newspaper.

The Medical Board of California, which licenses and oversees physicians, has appealed to the public to curb excessive prescribing, a step it took in response to recent Times articles on overdose deaths.

The board does not use CURES to identify doctors whose prescribing poses a danger to patients.

"We don't have the resources," executive director Linda K. Whitney told the Times.

CURES data is not available to the public, but similar information can be found on a commercial database used for marketing their products. The Times reviewed a list from such a database ranking the most prolific painkillers in the Los Angeles area for June 2008.

Of the top 10 doctors on the list, six were eventually convicted of drug dealing or similar crimes or were disciplined by regulators, the newspaper reported. Some had prescribed narcotics in high volume for years before their patients died of overdoses or related causes after taking drugs they prescribed, according to court records.

Nathan Barankin, chief of staff for Attorney General Kamala Harris, said her office wants to improve use of the database to identify drug-seeking patients, and to help prosecutors pursue dealers and other drug offenders. He proposed using CURES to detect signs of excessive prescribing, the Times said.

Barankin told the newspaper if the attorney general did begin using CURES to monitor overprescribing, the Department of Justice lacks the resources to follow up on leads.

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