

Many doctors not using site for keeping painkillers in check

September 30 2016, by Julie Carr Smyth

Ohio doctors are supposed check patients' prescription histories against a state website before recommending prescription painkillers, but an audit has found that some 12,000 physicians appear to be violating the policy aimed at stemming the opioid epidemic.

An August audit by the state Pharmacy Board identified the doctors who either weren't registered on the site or weren't using it properly. The panel turned the list over last week to the state Medical Board, which licenses physicians and has sent letters to all the doctors alerting them to potential violations. The total represents about one-third of Ohio physicians.

The crackdown comes as Ohio faces a drug overdose epidemic that's been tied in part to the ease of access to prescription opioids.

Medical Board spokeswoman Tessie Pollock said the board's priority will be the 45 physicians who apparently prescribed painkillers to more than 200 patients during the month without running the required checks.

The Pharmacy Board review found the top 25 physicians on the list failed to run the required report on a combined 7,500 patients. That included one doctor who prescribed painkillers to 705 patients in one month without running a single check.

Pollock said serious violators could face license suspension or revocation, probation or fines.

Many of the violations could turn out to be minor, so the board plans to couple the enforcement crackdown with an education program that helps doctors understand how to use the site, she said.

The Ohio State Medical Association, which represents physicians, said it doesn't believe 12,000 doctors are violating the law.

"We're certainly supportive of the Medical and Pharmacy boards taking these periodic looks and making sure people are in compliance, but it's really a checks-and-balances kind of thing," said Reggie Fields, a spokesman for the association.

Fields said the medical community recognizes the extent of the opiate addiction problem in the state and supports the law as a way to improve tracking of painkiller prescriptions and to identify patients who attempt to doctor shop to get more pills.

He said the association urges its members to respond to board letters and comply with the law.

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