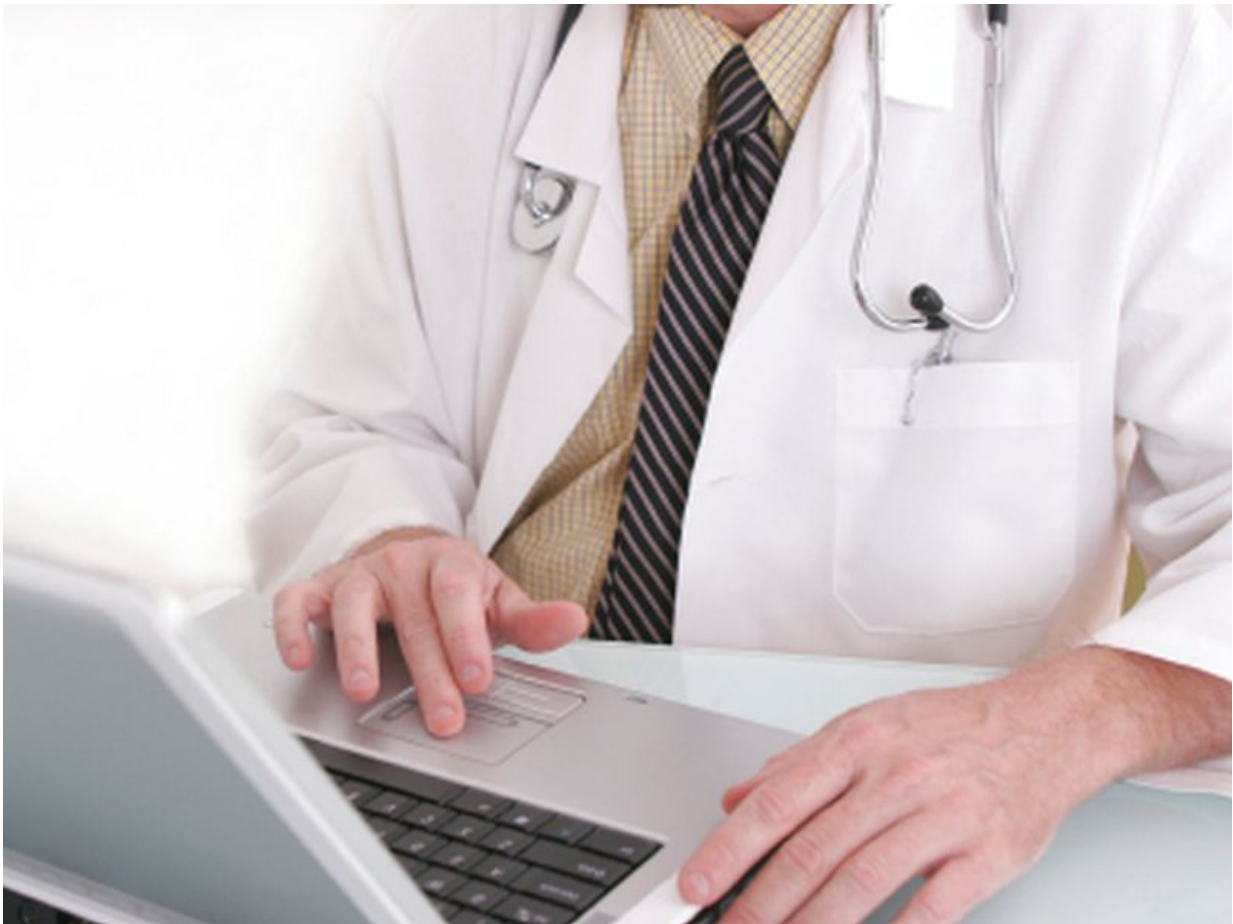


Checking patient's drug history may help curb opioid abuse

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(HealthDay)—Doctors can help stem the U.S. opioid epidemic by

checking their patients' drug history before prescribing powerful painkillers, a new study suggests.

Addicts frequently "doctor-shop" in an attempt to obtain opioids such as OxyContin (oxycodone), Percocet (oxycodone/acetaminophen) and Vicodin (hydrocodone/acetaminophen).

But, nearly every state now has a [database](#) tracking opioid [prescriptions](#), Cornell University researchers said. Doctors can use these databases to check their patients' past prescriptions and identify likely drug abusers.

"The main issue is getting providers to change their prescribing behavior. The majority of opioids that people abuse start in the medical system as a legitimate prescription," said study co-author Colleen Carey. She's an assistant professor of policy analysis and management at Cornell's College of Human Ecology in Ithaca, N.Y.

However, prescription databases only help combat drug abuse when doctors are required by law to check them before writing prescriptions, Carey and her colleagues noted in a university news release.

The researchers found that states that enforced a "must access" policy for prescription drug databases saw a drop in the number of Medicare recipients who got more than a seven-months' supply of medication in just six months. Also, fewer people filled a prescription before their previous supply ran out.

According to the study, the number of Medicare opioid users who received prescriptions from five or more doctors dropped by 8 percent in those states. And the number of people who got opioids from five or more pharmacies fell by more than 15 percent.

The effects of prescription database regulations were most notable in

[states](#) with the strictest laws, including New York, the researchers said.

New York requires [doctors](#) to check the [opioid](#) history of "every patient, every time," the researchers said. But even less stringent state laws reduced doctor-shopping, the study found.

The study looked only at Medicare recipients, but the researchers said their findings apply to the general population. They noted, however, that patients who abuse opioids could travel to a state with fewer regulations to more easily obtain their drugs.

The findings will be published in a future issue of *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse provides more information on [opioids](#).

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