



Pseudoephedrine diversion – beware of prescription requests

Update from the Pharmaceutical Services Branch, Department of Health

Although pseudoephedrine has a place in the relief of nasal congestion associated with acute or chronic rhinitis, it is also diverted for the production of illicit amphetamines.

The WA Police have reported an increase in:

- Diversion of pseudoephedrine products obtained by prescription to clandestine laboratories and
- Forged prescriptions for medicines containing pseudoephedrine.

Pharmacists are now required to record all 'over the counter' (OTC) sales of pseudoephedrine products on Project STOP™. This means pharmacists have access to 'real-time' records of pseudoephedrine purchases from pharmacies across Western Australia. Use of Project STOP™ reduces the chance of a 'pseudorunner' successfully purchasing pseudoephedrine products from a pharmacy. Those seeking to divert pseudoephedrine are therefore resorting to other sources of supply – including a prescription from a doctor.

Doctors are urged to ensure patients have a genuine therapeutic need for pseudoephedrine, particularly when the patient specifically requests this medicine. The National Prescribing Service (NPS) suggests that pseudoephedrine is only indicated in allergic rhinitis when there is severe nasal blockage or when patients need to travel by air.¹ For treatment of the common cold, there should be little need for access to quantities greater than those available OTC from a pharmacy.

In Queensland, where use of Project STOP™ by pharmacists has been mandatory for longer, it has been reported that those seeking pseudoephedrine prescriptions are often not a regular patient, may claim to work in a remote area and may have a seemingly plausible reason for why they cannot simply purchase from a pharmacy.

Doctors are also reminded to store prescription pads and computer stationary out of sight in a place which is inaccessible to the public.

Those seeking pseudoephedrine products may also alter the quantity to be supplied and the number of repeats. Doctors may receive queries from pharmacists asking for confirmation of prescription details.

The WA Police maintain a Chemical Diversion Desk and they appreciate assistance from any health practitioner who receives a suspicious request for pseudoephedrine products (telephone 92233133 or 92233145, weekdays). If calling after hours or on weekends, please use the CrimeStoppers number (1800 333 000). Doctors are also welcome to discuss such matters with the Duty Pharmacist at the Pharmaceutical Services Branch by calling 9222 4424 during usual office hours.

¹ NPS Radar, August 2006.

