

## Prescription Drug Abuse Trends in Florida

The illicit use of prescription pain medications is an issue that is emerging rapidly nationally and in Florida as a serious threat to health and wellbeing. SAMHSA reported in July 2008 that (intentional) misuse of prescription drugs is now second only to marijuana as the nation's most prevalent drug problem. The 2008 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS) reported that, among Florida adolescents, both lifetime and past-30-day prevalence rates for prescription pain relievers (8% and 3.2%, respectively) and depressants (6% and 2.1%, respectively) were higher than for all other illicit drugs, except marijuana and inhalants. This form of drug abuse is increasing at a faster rate than marijuana use.

- The non-medical use of prescription drugs has become an increasingly widespread and serious problem in this country; one that calls for immediate action.<sup>1</sup>
- Prescription drug abuse is skyrocketing, partly due to the growing number of "pill mills" where doctors write prescriptions for non-medical reasons.
- The intentional misuse of pain medications appears to be more prevalent in the northern part of Florida than in the southern regions. DCF Circuit 1 reported the highest rate of such use in the entire nation with 7.92 percent reporting such use.

Prescription pain killers—non-illicit opioids such as fentanyl, hydrocodone, and oxycodone are prominent among causes of drug deaths in Florida. These legal substances cause far more deaths annually in Florida than the single illicit opiate (heroin).

- The Medical Examiner district which is contiguous with DCF Circuit 14 has one of the highest death rates in the state; yet District 1, with a high rate of use, has a lower death rate.
- High death rates were also caused by these drugs in Palm Beach County, Duval and adjacent counties (Medical Examiner District 4), Pinellas County, Brevard County and a number of other more rural multi-county Medical Examiner districts. These drugs are often used in conjunction with illicit drugs and this polydrug use complicates attribution of cause of death to a specific substance.

### **Facts from the Field**

*Florida's Drug Epidemiology Networks*

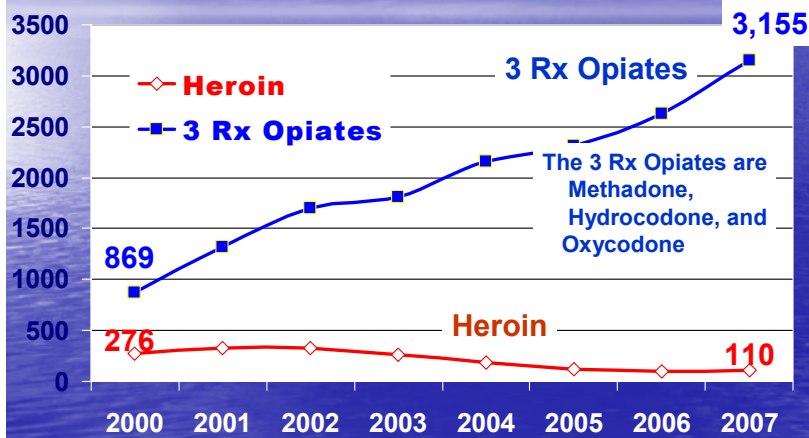
#### **Northeast Florida:**

- In Jacksonville, prescription narcotic analgesics specifically methadone, hydrocodone, and oxycodone, are the most commonly abused medications and are resulting in the most consequences such as deaths and emergency department visits.
- Jacksonville has a particularly acute problem with hydrocodone and have led the state in hydrocodone related and caused deaths in 2005, 2006, and in 2007.

#### **Southeast Florida:**

- In general, the consumption of prescription pain opioids such as methadone, hydrocodone and oxycodone over the past two years has declined 14% among Broward County residents ages 12 – 65+. Inversely, there has been a 14% increase in prescription pain opioid related deaths in 2007.
- Prescription benzodiazepines consumption rates have also decreased by 33% among Broward high school students. However, Rx benzodiazepines related deaths have increased by 9% in 2007.

## Opiate-Related Deaths in Florida 2000 - 2007



Source: FDLE Florida Medical Examiners Commission Reports 2000-2007

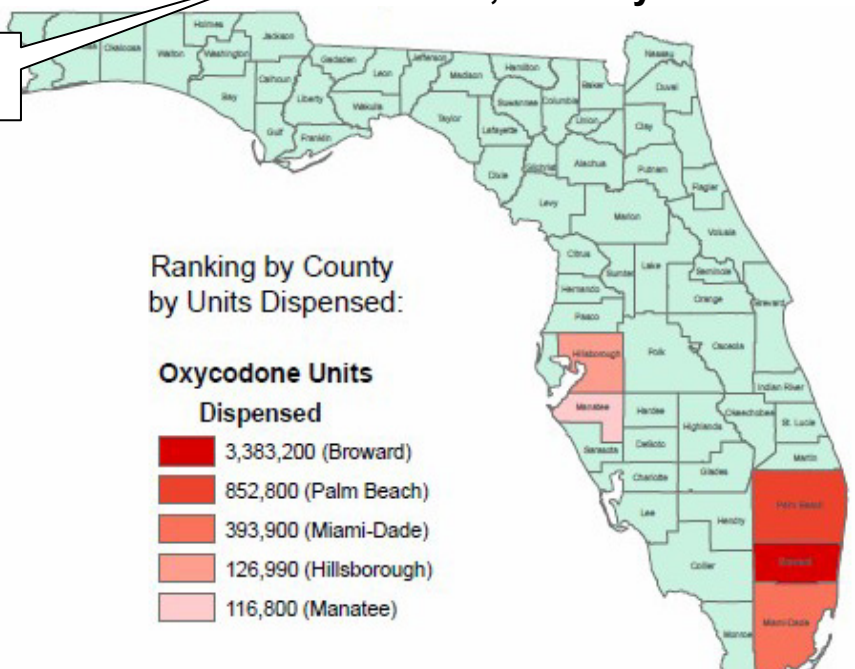
While heroin related deaths have decreased over time, there has been a sharp increase in opiate-related death between 2000-2007.

Deaths associated with the use of prescription narcotics are likely to result from a complex interplay of illicit experimentation with specific drugs, medical prescribing (overprescribing) of specific pain medications, addiction to pain killers from legitimate and illicit origins, and mixing of pain killers with other substances.

## Top 25 Dispensing Practitioners of Oxycodone in the U.S., January-June 2008

ALL are in Florida

The top 25 sellers of prescription pain medications, known by law enforcement as "pill mills," in the nation operate in Florida. All 25 dispensing practitioners are concentrated in 5 counties. Broward holds 68% of the top practitioners and 69.4% of the total units dispensed.



1. Office of National Drug Control Policy. (2004). Press Release: U.S. Drug Prevention, Treatment, Enforcement Agencies Take on "Doctor Shoppers," "Pill Mills." Retrieved December 2008 from <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press04/030104.html>

### About Florida's State Epidemiology Workgroup (SEW)

Florida's SEW was established in June 2005 under funding from a federal Strategic Prevention Framework – State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG). The SEW, which meets face-to-face on a semi-annual basis, is composed of members with expertise in epidemiologic data and/or drug policy drawn from a wide variety of state agencies, universities, and community-based organizations. SEW staffing is administered under a contract from Department of Children and Families to the Comprehensive Drug Research Center at the University of Miami - Miller School of Medicine (UM).

For more information, visit: <http://www3.med.miami.edu/tpeg/x55.xml>

