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S Y S T E M

Title:	Street prices of prescription opioids diverted to the illicit market
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Abstract:

Aims: Prescription opioid abuse and diversion have become major public health problems in recent years, contributing to a wide range of health, social and economic consequences among affected populations. Within this context, there is an ongoing need to identify and examine new, proactive indicators to better characterize the prescription opioid abuse and diversion problem. In this regard, we implemented a national street price surveillance program with law enforcement investigators. Monitoring trends in street prices for prescription opioids may provide an indicator of drug availability, demand, and abuse potential within targeted geographic areas.

Methods: We examined street prices of diverted prescription opioids using surveillance data from a nationwide network of law enforcement officers, collected as part of the RADARS[®] System. Drug diversion investigators were surveyed quarterly during 2010 and 2011 regarding the street prices of diverted prescription opioids in their areas. We computed mean and median prices per milligram for the targeted prescription opioids in order to make standardized price comparisons across drug classes. Trends in price data over time were also examined.

Results: Street prices per milligram ranked as follows: hydromorphone (mean=\$5.87; med=\$5.00); oxymorphone (mean=\$3.00; med=\$2.00); methadone (mean=\$1.30; med=\$1.00); oxycodone (mean=\$1.14; med=\$1.00); hydrocodone (mean=\$1.05; med=\$1.00); morphine (mean=\$0.95; med=\$0.96); tramadol (mean=\$0.14; med=\$0.10); and, tapentadol (mean=\$0.13; med=\$0.10).

Conclusions: Our analyses yielded substantial differences in street price by opioid class. Higher street values appear to reflect greater drug desirability/demand among abuser populations. Street price appears to be a useful indicator of drug popularity among abuser groups.

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