

# RADARS<sup>®</sup>

S Y S T E M

<b>Title:</b>	Street prices of prescription opioids diverted to the illicit market: data from a national surveillance program
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<b>Meeting:</b>	International Conference on Opioids Annual Conference
<b>Date:</b>	June 2013
<b>Location</b>	Boston, MA

## Abstract:

**Background:** Prescription opioid abuse and diversion are major problems causing a wide range of health and socioeconomic consequences. There is a need to identify proactive indicators to better characterize prescription opioid abuse and diversion. A national surveillance program was implemented to monitor prescription opioid street price trends as an indicator of availability, demand, and abuse potential.

**Methods:** Street prices of diverted prescription opioids were examined using surveillance data collected as part of the RADARS<sup>®</sup> System, which measures US rates of prescription opioid abuse and diversion. The RADARS<sup>®</sup> Drug Diversion Program comprises 250 prescription drug diversion investigators from law enforcement and regulatory agencies that complete quarterly questionnaires on new diversion cases in their jurisdictions. Street price data were obtained from 687 questionnaires collected during 7 quarters in 2010 and 2011. Street prices of diverted prescription opioids were computed (mean and median prices/mg) to make standardized price comparisons across drug classes. Street price trends were also examined.

**Results:** Street price per/mg ranked as follows: hydromorphone (mean=\$5.57;median=\$5.00); buprenorphine (\$2.93;\$1.88); oxymorphone (\$2.04;\$1.50); methadone (\$1.26;\$1.00); IR oxycodone (\$1.05;\$1.00); hydrocodone (\$0.99;\$1.00); ER oxycodone (\$0.85;\$0.88); morphine (\$0.74;\$0.67); tramadol (\$0.14;\$0.10); and tapentadol (\$0.10;\$0.10). Although minor street price fluctuations were observed between quarters, street prices were consistent over time with the exception of ER oxycodone, which experienced a street price decline after the tamper deterrent formulation launch in August 2010. Analyses yielded substantial differences in street prices for each opioid monitored. Higher street prices appear to reflect greater drug desirability/demand among abuser populations, and limited illicit market availability.

**Conclusions:** Street price appears to be a useful indicator of drug popularity among abuser groups. Formulary decisions may need to consider prescription opioid abuse and diversion rates and street prices for illicit sales.

**Funding:** Support for this research was provided by a contract from Denver Health & Hospital Authority.