

Local hospitals create ER policy to reduce pain pill abuse

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Worried about the stream of people coming to emergency rooms in search of powerful pain pills, hospitals across Ventura County have adopted a uniform strategy to reduce abuse.

In guidelines revealed Thursday, leaders of the eight emergency rooms in the county said they won't prescribe some opioids, including OxyContin. They also won't provide missing doses of other drugs such as Methadone.

Hospitals will try to identify abusers by using the state database, CURES, that tracks prescriptions for controlled substances.

"I wish we would have done this five years ago," said Dr. Marty Ehrlich of guidelines aimed at making sure all emergency rooms deal with pain medications in the same way.

"Patients will drive a long way at times to take advantage of a soft spot," said Ehrlich, medical director of emergency medicine at Ventura County Medical Center.

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The countywide effort was coordinated by the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department and a county group put together to address prescription drug abuse. At a news conference Thursday at Los Robles Hospital & Medical Center in Thousand Oaks, emergency rooms urged the importance of balancing concerns about drug abuse with the real needs of medication for patients in pain.

“Patients come in vulnerable and in pain and still need our care,” said Dr. Carlo Reyes, assistant medical director of the emergency department at Los Robles.

But attempts at prescription misuse in emergency rooms are common.

“It’s at least an every other shift if not an every shift phenomenon,” Reyes said. He cited federal statistics showing that of every four patients who misuse prescriptions, three of them are using someone else’s prescription.

The new policy replaces a system where individual doctors made their own decisions without formalized guidelines, said Dr. Neil Canby, an ER doctor in the Community Memorial Health System.

The guidelines will be handed out to patients. In it, doctors say they won’t refill prescriptions that a patient says was lost or stolen; often won’t provide pain medication if a patient already receives the same type of medicine from another doctor; and will prescribe only limited amounts of pills through the emergency room.

“The ER is not the place to try to get 30 days worth of pain medication,” said Dr. Celia Woods, medical director of adult services at Ventura County Behavioral Health Department.

To see the new guidelines, go to <http://bit.ly/1wFFEZK> (<http://bit.ly/1wFFEZK>).

http://www.vcstar.com/apps?utm_source=utm_campaign%3Dapps_story_embed&utm_medium=utm_medium%3Dstory_embed&utm_campaign=utm_campaign%3Dstory_embeds

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