Proper Prescription Writing to Prevent Diversion in Medical Practice

Writing prescriptions for controlled substances needs to be done with care. Here are some tips for reducing the chances that your script can be used by diverters.

- Write prescriptions like you write checks – write out strength and quantity in both numbers and letters. For example, “10 mg <ten>” and “#15 <fifteen>”.

- If no refills are required, circle “zero” and cross out the other refill numbers, and/or specify “no refills.”

- Do not pre-print your Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Registration number on prescription pads – write the number in by hand. A prescription for an antibiotic or other routine medication can be “rinsed” or “washed.” Rinsing is when acetone (nail polish remover) or xylene is used to remove the writing from the body of a prescription. A diverter can then re-write it as a prescription for controlled substances, with signatures that appear to be legitimate. Handwriting your DEA number in also prevents lost/stolen prescription pads from being used.

- Gel ink pens are the most resistant to rinsing because the ink is more deeply imbedded in the fibers of the paper. Refillable ink fountain pens are also a good option. Ball point pens and regular ink pens are more prone to rinsing. Tamper resistant and permanent ink pens are available at office supply stores, including the UniBall 207.

- Consider keeping photocopies of prescriptions in patient files. If a pharmacy calls to question a prescription, you can verify the script by faxing a copy to them.

- Prescription pads with serial numbers make it more difficult for diverters to obtain controlled substances and prevent lost or stolen prescription pads from being used. Serialized prescription pads can be ordered from medical suppliers.

- A federal law was passed by the US congress in May, 2007 requiring the use of tamper resistant prescription pads for all Medicaid outpatient drugs. As of October 1, 2007, a prescription pad must contain at least one of the following characteristics. And on October 1, 2008, a prescription pad must contain all three of the characteristics.

  1. One or more industry-recognized features designed to prevent unauthorized copying of a completed or blank prescription form
  2. One or more industry-recognized features designed to prevent the erasure or modification of information written on the prescription by the prescriber
  3. One or more industry-recognized features designed to prevent the use of counterfeit prescription forms