
Drug Diversion in Healthcare

Kelly Heiser, Pharmacy Policy Consultant
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Presenter/Speaker Personal Disclosure

- Presenter's Name: Kelly Heiser
- I have no current or past relationships with commercial entities

Commercial Disclosure

- This learning activity has received **an honorarium** from the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta.

Objectives:



- Identify 3 signs and symptoms people with substance use disorder experience
 - Increase awareness of diversion in hospital settings (how people get started)
 - Identify how medications are diverted
 - Identify diversion reduction strategies and technology used in healthcare facilities
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Background

Substance Use Disorder Signs & Symptoms

Overview

Substance Use Disorder is “a mental disorder that affects a person’s brain and behavior, leading to a person’s inability to control their use of substances such as legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications” ([NIMH » Substance Use and Co-Occurring Mental Disorders \(nih.gov\)](#))

NOTE: The below lists are meant to illustrate some of the signs and symptoms that have been identified in substance use disorder; it is not meant to be an exhaustive list.

Physical Signs

- ▶ Constricted pupils
- ▶ Sweating, chills, runny nose
- ▶ Itching, scratching
- ▶ Vomiting, diarrhea
- ▶ Needle tracks (may wear long sleeves in extreme heat)
- ▶ Blood on scrubs around arms or legs
- ▶ Erratic behavior (e.g., forgetfulness, drowsiness, malaise, euphoria, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and paranoia)

Behaviors

- ▶ Deviation from accepted wastage practices
 - ▶ Failure to waste, wasting full doses, having a waste ‘buddy’ (always wasting by the same two people), holding waste for extended periods of time
- ▶ Volunteering to prepare or administer medications to patients with controlled substances orders
- ▶ Well-liked and considered bright
- ▶ Volunteer for OT and extra shifts, come in on days off just to visit
- ▶ May disappear for extended periods of time (abnormal bathroom and other break patterns)

Health Canada Statistics

Number of apparent opioid toxicity deaths by province or territory in 2024

Region	Number
British Columbia	2,339
Alberta	1,189
Saskatchewan	237
Manitoba	370
Ontario	2,242
Quebec	645
New Brunswick	82
Nova Scotia	67
Prince Edward Island	7
Newfoundland and Labrador	47
Yukon	14
Northwest Territories	6
Nunavut	n/a

Diversion In Healthcare

Substance use disorder rates in the community can be directly correlated to hospital workers 1:1 ratio

10 – 15 % of Healthcare workers will develop substance use disorder

Many workers in health care will divert medications throughout their career

Dabney, 2001
Knight et al., 2022

How Substance Use Disorder and Diversion Start?

Injury

Extra
Income

Prescribing

Stressed
out

Not
Sleeping

By
Mistake



Diversion In Healthcare

40
Investigations
(2020)

Automated
Dispensing
Cabinets (ADC)

Cocaine
Powder

EMS



BOTs

To-Go-Packs

OR Procedure
Rooms



Victims of Diversion



Patients

Organizations

Families &
Friends

Co-Workers



How Medications are Diverted



Starting the Conversation:



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See Something,
Say Something

Diversion Reduction Strategies and Technology Used by Other Hospitals



Health Canada Legislation

Controlled Drugs & Substances Act	Narcotic Control Regulations
• Offences & Punishment • Trafficking • Possession • Production • Sentencing • Evidence-based Diversion Measures • Enforcement and Criminal Code • Exemption for medical purpose- supervised consumption site	• Authorized activities • Authorized persons Hospitals General obligations 63 A person who is in charge of a hospital shall a) Keep or cause to be kept in a book, register or other record maintained for such purposes... b) Maintain the recorded information in such forms as to enable an audit... c) Take all necessary steps to protect narcotics in the hospital against loss or theft, and report to the Minister any loss or theft of narcotics within 10 days of discovery

CSHP Guideline

**Controlled Drugs and
Substances in Hospitals
and Healthcare Facilities:**
Guidelines on Secure
Management and
Diversion Prevention



Lessons Learned

- Identify 3 signs and symptoms people with substance use disorder experience.
- Identify the health care professionals that are more at risk for substance use disorder and diversion.
- Identify the legislation that outlines authorized activities and responsibilities when handling controlled substances.

Drug Diversion:

Questions, comments or suggestions?

Email:

kheiser1@telus.net

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