



**FLORIDA  
BOARD OF  
MEDICINE:**

**Chairperson**  
Laurie K. Davies, M.D.  
Gainesville, Florida

Jeb Bush  
Governor  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

**FLORIDA  
BOARD OF  
NURSING:**

**Chairperson**  
Patricia Dittman, RN,  
Coral Springs, Florida

Re: Prescription Drug Abuse

Dear Governor Bush:

**FLORIDA  
BOARD OF  
OSTEOPATHIC  
MEDICINE:**

**Chairperson**  
James Andriole, DO  
Tallahassee, Florida

The Florida Boards of Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy thank you for your continuing support of measures to reduce prescription drug abuse in Florida. Representatives of our boards met on September 19 to discuss this critical issue and agreed that action is urgently needed to stem the rapid rise of prescription drug abuse and deaths related to that abuse. After review and evaluation of the information provided at the joint meeting our boards have ratified this decision.

The joint committee and the Boards considered alarming information provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Florida Medical Examiners about the situation we are facing with prescription drug abuse. The 2004 Report of Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons substantiated the following:

**FLORIDA  
BOARD OF  
PHARMACY:**

**Chairperson**  
Gail A. Merrell, Pharm. D.  
Tierra Verde, Florida

1. During that period there were approximately 170,000 deaths in Florida. Of those, 7,128 individuals were found to have died with one or more of the drugs specified in this report in their bodies.
2. Prescription drugs continued to be found more often than illicit drugs in both lethal and non-lethal levels.
3. Benzodiazepine occurrences rose 12%. Alprazolam occurrences increased 21% and deaths caused by Alprazolam increased by 37%.
4. More than 50 percent of the deaths were caused by the drug when the drug was found; Heroin (83 percent), Methadone (65 percent), Fentanyl (63 percent), and Oxycodone (50 percent).
5. Oxycodone and Hydrocodone showed an increase of 7% and 10%, respectively during 2004 when compared to 2003. Death caused by Oxycodone rose 14%, while deaths caused by Hydrocodone increased by 27%.
6. Methadone occurrences increased significantly during 2004 by 40%, and *deaths caused by Methadone rose 51% when compared to 2003.*

NIDA (National Institute for Drug Abuse) reported that 10.5% of America's high school seniors used hydrocodone on more than 5 occasions last year for non-medical reasons.

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**Mission Statement:** To protect health care consumers by licensing qualified health providers, establishing and enforcing health care standards and disseminating appropriate information to consumers and practitioners.

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"Prescription drug abuse is a rapidly growing problem in Florida," said Director of the Office of Drug Control Jim McDonough. "While we have made progress in bringing down the abuse of traditional drugs like heroin, prescription drug deaths continue to rise. We need to educate people of all ages about the dangers associated with prescription drugs and reinforce the message that, if abused, these legal drugs can be lethal."

The joint committee also received testimony supporting the need for action, particularly, the electronic controlled substance reporting system from, from representatives of many agencies impacted by this crisis:

1. Practitioner Resource Network
2. Intervention Project for Nurses
3. Federation of State Medical Boards
4. Florida Society of Anesthesiologists
5. Big Bend Hospice
6. Florida Patient Safety Corporation
7. Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)
8. FDLE District 10 Medical Examiner
9. Agency for Health care Administration
10. James McDonough, Office of Drug Control

As members of the health care boards we have made a commitment to protect public safety. We believe that the time has come to stop Florida's history of making the availability of prescription drugs easy to abuse. We recognize that some of this is the proliferation of Internet pharmacies which are difficult to regulate but the majority arises from within our ranks in Florida. In this light, we respectfully ask for your strong public support to stem the growing tide of prescription drug abuse. It has reached crisis proportions and we need to act rapidly and decisively from multiple fronts, in order to protect the public and our children.

We believe the following actions will start us on the road to regain control over that easy availability, improve patient care and recruit public participation in the campaign.

1. **Creation of an electronic reporting system for prescription drugs (e.g., Central Pharmacy Register).** We strongly believe this is the single most effective manner to combat drug diversion. There is pending legislation before the 2006 Florida Legislature, SB176 and SD178, to create such a system. We are at an attractive time to start this as the US Congress recently passed NASPER (National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting) legislation providing millions of dollars of seed monies to assist States in its creation and support the system in those States with one already in place (no less than 22 States).
2. **Require picture identification at the pharmacy prior to filling a controlled substance.** This would eliminate the "buying" of prescriptions by drug dealers and complicit "patients".
3. **Reform of legislatively mandated Continuing Education requirements.** We feel that continuing education should be considered dynamic to reflect the educational need of the health care community to improve public health.

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- 4 **Public service advertisements from your office regarding the prescription drug crisis.** Your continued strong leadership can assist in shepherding the bill through approval and will galvanize public opinion.
- 5. **Advocacy for education in controlled substance prescription drug indications to health care practitioners and the public.**

We appreciate the opportunity to be active participants with you in making Florida a safer place for our patients and families. We believe you can expect the whole hearted support of the Florida Medical Association, the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association, Florida Nurses Association, Florida Pharmacy Association, Florida Society of Anesthesiologists, Florida Academy of Pain Medicine, and Florida Universities Pain Medicine Program Directors at the University of Florida, the University of South Florida, and the University of Miami.

Sincerely,

On file  
Laurie K. Davies, M.D.

On file  
Patricia Dittman, R.N.

On file  
James Andriole, D.O .

On file  
Gail A. Merrell, Pharm. D.

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