

Reduce the Risk of Drug Diversion in Health Care

The Opioid Crisis at a Glance

In the last
20 YEARS
the number of overdose deaths tied to prescription pain killers grew by almost **400%**¹

More than
17,000 AMERICANS
overdose each year on prescription opioids¹



Health Care Organizations Are at Risk

Opioids are often an effective and important part of patient care. Health care organizations have taken great steps addressing the risks involved in prescribing opioids. However, if they are not careful in how they store, administer and dispose of these drugs, they can increase the chances of diversion. Staff or patients may improperly obtain controlled substances for illicit use.

Although drug diversion is most likely to occur in hospitals due to the accessibility of controlled substances in these settings, diversion can happen anywhere. Non-acute care facilities, long-term care facilities, outpatient clinics and veterinary clinics should have mitigation strategies in place that limit the likelihood of theft and keep patients and staff safe.

Key Drug Diversion Prevention Strategies

Effective tactics fall into several categories:

✔ Policies

Rules and regulations of controlled substance storage, administration and disposal must be:

- Clear and readily available to all employees
- Reviewed periodically
- Kept up-to-date

✔ Training

Empower staff to mitigate diversion through training, including:

- Preventing theft and other common diversion methods
- Proper disposal such as special containers and witness-disposal

✔ Physical Controls

Red bags and sharps containers are vulnerable to diversion. Use containers specifically designed for narcotics that employ:

- Non-retrievable one-way disposal path
- Neutralizing agent to render drug unusable
- Lockable features

✔ Periodic Auditing

In addition to providing periodic training, regularly monitor and ensure staff follow procedures concerning:

- Storage and inventory
- Administration and disposal

✔ Patient Resources

72% of Americans surveyed believe having a safe and secure way to dispose of their leftover prescription drugs would help combat the opioid epidemic.² In the event that a patient asks to return unused drugs to a health care facility, staff should be aware of other disposal resources as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) doesn't allow health care organizations to accept leftover medications from patients.

Some examples of patient takeback programs include:

- Mailback envelopes
- Drug disposal kiosks
- Community takeback days



Consult an Expert

When implementing a drug diversion prevention program, health care organizations may want to consult a highly experienced partner like Stericycle that specializes in hazardous waste and controlled substance disposal.

We protect what matters.

Sources:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse, Overdose Death Rates, Figure 4, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>, accessed April 2019.
2. Stericycle 2019 Drug Takeback Study: Unused Prescriptions and the Opioid Epidemic, <https://www.stericycle.com/knowledge-center/kc/original-research/2019-drug-takeback-survey-unused-prescriptions-an>, April 2019.

