CURES Update

What Is The CURES System?

California’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES), allows authorized physicians, law enforcement, and regulatory agencies to view information on Schedule II – IV controlled substances dispensed to patients in California. Pharmacists and direct dispensers are required to report information on all Schedule II – IV controlled substances dispensed, and must do so within seven days of dispensing. The information is then uploaded into CURES. The CURES system has provided prescribers and dispensers with Schedule II – IV prescription data via an online web portal since 2009. The system, as currently configured, provides authorized prescribers and dispensers who have registered on the system with prescription detail for an individual patient’s prescription records (Patient Activity Report, or PAR), which includes the patient’s name, date of birth, and address; drug name, form, strength, quantity, dispensing pharmacy name and license number; prescriber DEA Certificate number; prescriber name, prescription number; refill number; and date of dispense. A physician can use this information for multiple purposes, including identifying a patient who may be a “doctor shopper,” viewing medications dispensed to the patient that were prescribed by other physicians, and providing a complete picture of Scheduled drugs dispensed to a patient.

The CURES system can be an extremely helpful tool for physicians who are prescribing controlled substances. The Medical Board’s newly revised Guidelines for Prescribing Controlled Substances for Pain emphasizes that physicians should use the CURES PDMP to identify patients who obtain drugs from multiple sources as

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The Mission of the Medical Board of California

The mission of the Medical Board of California is to protect health care consumers through the proper licensing and regulation of physicians and surgeons and certain allied health care professions and through the vigorous, objective enforcement of the Medical Practice Act, and to promote access to quality medical care through the Board’s licensing and regulatory functions.
Reporting Lapses of Consciousness – What is Your Legal Responsibility?

By Linda Hill, M.D., MPH

Your 34-year-old diabetic patient reports a hypoglycemic episode resulting in temporary disorientation and near loss of consciousness. If the patient drives, are you required to notify the health department of the diagnosis?

Based on California Health and Safety Code section 103900, the answer is yes. The code states that every physician and surgeon shall notify the local health officer when they have diagnosed a patient with a disorder characterized by lapses of consciousness.

Lapses of consciousness pose a particular threat to motorists and others who share the road. Such conditions are characterized by:

- marked reduction of alertness or responsiveness to external stimuli;
- inability to perform one or more activities of daily living; or
- impaired sensory motor functions used to operate a motor vehicle.

Examples of conditions that may, but do not always, cause the functional impairment included in the definition of lapses of consciousness are syncope, hyper- and hypoglycemia, seizures, dementia (including Alzheimer’s disease), brain neoplasms, post-CVA status, narcolepsy and sleep apnea. Making the decision to report a patient depends on whether the lapse of consciousness is related to an ongoing condition or a one-time event. For example, a one-time loss of consciousness due to a single event, such as a sport-related concussion, is likely not reportable, unless there is residual impairment.

Physicians are protected from liability for making good-faith reports. Indeed, failing to report may have consequences if a patient with a qualifying condition subsequently experiences a motor vehicle crash. The California Department of Public Health has a specific form for reporting lapses of consciousness; it is the Confidential Morbidity Report Form 110C. The form requests information that pertains to driving and will be forwarded to the California Department of Motor Vehicles.

The Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDS) program at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), has resources to assist physicians in the identification and management of patients with age-related driving impairments. A short video, Physician Mandated Reporting of Drivers in California, reviews medical conditions that require reporting and provides case examples. An easy reference pocket guide with screening and reporting guidelines is available at no charge.

While discussions about driving may be difficult to initiate, compliance with these requirements protects patients, their families and our communities from harm. For additional information, visit the TREDS website or call 858-534-9330.

(Dr. Hill, the director of TREDS, is a professor at UCSD and chairs the Graduate Medical Education Committee, American College of Preventive Medicine.)

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