

Gabapentin diversion and misuse in the United States from a law enforcement perspective:

Diversion rates 2002-2015 and qualitative research findings

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Gabapentin

- γ -aminobutyric acid (GABA)-analogue
- Treatment of epilepsy and neuralgia
- Prescribed off-label

- Low addictive liability level
- Prescription required
- Not scheduled under CSA
- Brands – Neurontin, Horizant, Gralise



Gabapentin diversion

Prescription drug diversion involves the unlawful channeling of regulated pharmaceuticals from legal sources to the illicit marketplace.

- Doctor shopping
- Shared medication from family / friends
- Direct trade / sale in street markets
- Theft

Gabapentin misuse

Abuse and Diversion of Gabapentin Among Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Users in Appalachian Kentucky

Gabapentinoid Abuse in Order to Potentiate the Effect of Methadone: A Survey among Substance Misusers

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Potentiation of the Effect of Buprenorphine/Naloxone With Gabapentin or Quetiapine

TO THE EDITOR: Although it is an effective treatment for opioid dependence, buprenorphine/naloxone may be misused. We report here a case of potentiation of buprenorphine/naloxone with gabapentin and quetiapine.

Gabapentin misuse, abuse and diversion: a systematic review

Rachel V. Smith^{1,2,3}, Jennifer R. Havens^{1,2} & Sharon L. Walsh^{1,4,5}

Prescription Medication Misuse Among Opioid Dependent Patients Seeking Inpatient Detoxification

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Aims

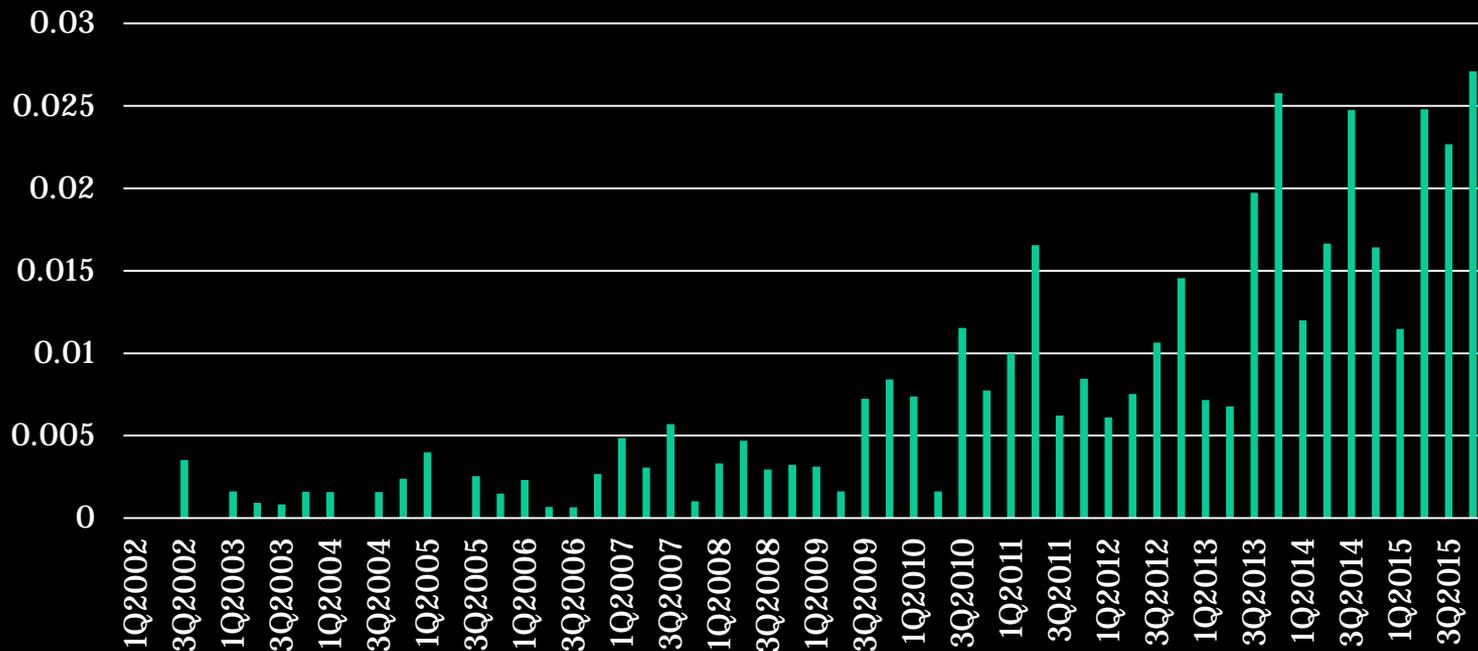
- Examine gabapentin diversion
 - National sample of law enforcement / regulatory agencies
 - 2002-2015
- Qualitative data on gabapentin misuse

Methods

- RADARS[®] Drug Diversion Program
- Quarterly survey of Rx drug diversion
- Includes approximately 250 investigators
- Covers 1/3 of the total U.S. population

- Qualitative questionnaire – April 2016
- *“Have you seen or heard anything about increases in the abuse or diversion of gabapentin in your jurisdiction? If so, can you please comment on the characteristics of abusers, modes of diversion, and street value of the drugs?”*

Rates of gabapentin diversion (per 100,000) by quarter, 2002-2015



Qualitative findings – Related to Rx opioids / heroin

- “Many abusers stated they would take it with opioids to increase the duration of the ‘high’.” – Tennessee
- “[Gabapentin] has been abused in conjunction with Suboxone (buprenorphine).” – Kentucky
- “It is our understanding that heroin users are mixing a combination of gabapentin and heroin and injecting the compound.” – Alabama
- “Drug users have been mixing gabapentin and heroin together and injecting.” - Louisiana

Qualitative findings – Diversion

- “We had two cases this quarter where gabapentin was reported stolen.” – Idaho
- “I had an overdose death of a 26 year old female... she was doctor shopping for gabapentin.” – Georgia
- “I did notice [gabapentin being an issue] when looking at my doctor shoppers and larceny of pill reports.” – North Carolina
- “We bought gabapentin once in the past year; sold via Craigslist.” – California

Qualitative findings – Street value

- “Many patients have learned of its street value and are selling or trading it for narcotics.” – Kentucky
- “Street value is about \$10.00 a pill.” – Michigan



Discussion

- Gabapentin diversion rates increased from 0 cases in 2002 to .027 cases (per 100,000) in 2015
 - Compare to:
 - .021 cases for OxyContin[®] in 2015
 - 2.5 cases for 6 Rx opioids in 2015
- Gabapentin is:
 - being used in conjunction with Rx opioids
 - combined with heroin and injected

Discussion

- Finding supports growing evidence of misuse:
 - 15-26% of Rx opioid misusers
 - Up to 65% of individuals with a gabapentin prescription
 - 2,950% increase in gabapentin misuse among Rx opioid misusers in Kentucky



Next steps

- Additional epidemiologic research
- Research conducted among gabapentin misusers
- Post-marketing surveillance of diversion



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