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Number of Oxycodone-Related Deaths in Florida Dropped Significantly in 2012

Deaths caused by oxycodone dropped 41 percent in Florida last year, according to a new government report.

Deaths linked to methadone, hydrocodone and cocaine also decreased, according to the Miami Herald.

Oxycodone still causes more deaths than any other drug in Florida, the state Medical Examiners Office reports. In 2012, drugs were either present or the cause of death in 8,330 people in Florida, down from 9,135 the previous year.

In March, the state reported the number of deaths due to oxycodone decreased by 29 percent in the first six months of 2012, compared with the second half of the previous year.

The drugs that caused the most deaths in the first half of 2012 were benzodiazepines, oxycodone, ethyl alcohol, methadone and cocaine. The report found deaths due to methadone and hydrocodone decreased 18.3 percent and 16.4 percent, respectively. Deaths caused by cocaine decreased by 11.6 percent.

The findings provide evidence the state is successfully fighting the prescription drug abuse epidemic, officials said. For many years, Florida was a popular destination for people who wanted to buy prescription drugs at "pill mills" and doctors' offices.

In 2011, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed into law a bill designed to cut down on prescription drug abuse by controlling pill mills in the state. The law authorized the creation of a prescription-drug monitoring database to reduce doctor-shopping by people looking to collect multiple painkiller prescriptions. The legislation also imposed new penalties for physicians who overprescribe medication and imposes stricter rules for operating pharmacies.

Prescription pain relievers include the opioid class of drugs, such as hydrocodone (i.e., Vicodin), oxycodone (i.e., OxyContin), morphine, fentanyl and codeine. Opioids work by

mimicking the body's natural pain-relieving chemicals, attaching to receptors in the brain to block the perception of pain. Opioids can produce drowsiness, nausea, constipation, and slow breathing. Opioids also can induce euphoria by affecting the brain regions that mediate what we perceive as pleasure. Click here to read more.