

rx patrol

Data clearinghouse helps take a bite out of pharmacy crime

By Antoinette Alexander

Imagine you are working at the pharmacy counter and an electrician, carrying a ladder and light bulbs, approaches the counter and tells you he is there to fix the lights behind the counter area. Seems legitimate, right? Well, he may not be an electrician at all, but instead a criminal who is there to steal prescription medication.

Though this may sound far-fetched, it actually happened and is one of hundreds of incidents reported to RxPatrol, an information clearinghouse for data related to pharmacy robberies, burglaries and theft that involve the loss of controlled substances. It is through this database, developed in 2003 by Purdue Pharma L.P., that technicians and other pharmacy personnel can glean valuable crime-fighting information.

"[Technicians] are the face of pharmacy many times. They are going to be not only victims, but they are also going to be great witnesses and so we really want them to be aware of what is happening, how it happened and what it looks like so they can recognize [the threat]," said Aaron Graham, vice president and chief security officer of RxPatrol, which teamed up with Crime Stoppers in 2005 and offers \$1,000 cash rewards for information that could help the police with their investigation.

In the past 24 or so months, Rx-

Pharmacy Robbery - Top 10 States*

State	Number of Incidents
MA	98
IN	75
OH	69
FL	53
PA	41
AZ	41
WI	29
UT	28
CA	27
KY	19

*reflects 2007 through October 8

Patrol has resulted in nearly 60 arrests, 33 of those occurring just this year.

When asked about red flags that pharmacy technicians can look for when working in the pharmacy, Graham recommended that technicians check out their database, located at www.rxpatrol.org, to learn about the crime patterns and trends in their particular area. The RxPatrol Searchable Database contains data from hundreds of incidents involving pharmacy robberies, burglaries, fraud, forgery and cargo theft. Those who sign up also can view maps and create charts indicative of theft trends in their geographic area.

Technicians can learn, for example, how many pharmacy robberies have occurred in their city, what time of day they typically occur, what the suspect typically does and what the suspect looks like.

"We have identified the profile of the pharmacy robbery suspect," said Graham, who noted that the database

is not available to the general public.

By arming themselves with such information, technicians can be better prepared if they find themselves a victim of a crime. That does not mean, however, that they should try to be "a hero" and sacrifice the safety of themselves or others. Graham said the best thing technicians can do is pay attention to details.

"Let's start making good observations—height, weight, hair color, facial hair, scars, marks, tattoos, age, accent—so I can be a good witness. What does he touch, not touch, how does he approach? If we have closed circuit TV, where did he go where cameras might have best captured his image?" advised Graham.

Graham said RxPatrol had launched on its Web site, as of November, a video on pharmacy safety and security and how to be a good witness. The 12-minute video, featuring interviews with FBI agents, police officers and pharmacists who were victims, talks about what to be aware of and how to behave in such a situation.

"Let's be smart. Let's be safe. Let's be good witnesses and let's not try to be a hero. Let [the suspect] come and go and let law enforcement do their job," Graham said. "The thing you can do most to help law enforcement is be a good witness." ●