

BROWARD COUNTY:  
THEIR  
RESPONSE  
to **DRUG**  
DIVERSION

by Lisa McElhaney

**P**harmaceutical drug diversion attacks our communities in much the same manner as the traditional street level drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and marijuana. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) estimates that over 4 million individuals across the United States use pharmaceutical drugs for non-medical purposes, while a combined estimate of 2.4 million abuse cocaine and heroin.

The Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida under the leadership of Sheriff Ken Jenne has taken an aggressive and proactive response to the issue of drug diversion. It is the only agency in Broward County with a specialized unit assigned to investigate and track major groups and organizations engaged in the obtaining and street sales of large quantities of prescription (Rx) drugs throughout the county, as well as their activities throughout Florida.

For the unit to operate with the utmost efficiency, it has developed an open line of communication with all intra-agency units. This allows the intelligence information to be processed and filtered to the necessary investigative resources. BSO's Diversion Unit receives and provides intelligence assistance to numerous state, federal, administrative, regulatory and local law enforcement agencies.

Pharmaceutical drug use and abuse is not limited to simple prescription fraud investigations. The investigation of pharmaceutical drug abuse has repeatedly taxed investigators in all areas of law enforcement, including robbery, homicide, rape, aggravated assault, domestic violence, suicides, overdoses, DUI investigations, and the list goes on.

These incidents pose a serious threat to the welfare of our communities and reports have been on a steady increase in the last several years. Typically the investigation of these incidents can not be handled in the same fashion as your traditional street level drug investigations. That's because the majority of the drugs abused are actually legal substances, which are provided by state and federally licensed physicians and pharmacists. It is the unlawful abuse or transfer of these substances that place the greatest threat on our communities.

Pharmaceutical drug diversion reaps large profit for the traffickers, and devastation for the abusers. This activity eventually affects their friends, families, and their workplace. The diversion of pharmaceutical drugs means that legal prescription drugs were illegally obtained, sold or delivered. This illegal activity may have been accomplished by fraud, deception, or an outright theft of the drugs. Many health care professionals are faced daily with these drug seekers on the prowl. The stalking of these abusers is very taxing on legitimate physicians, pharmacists, dentists, and their staff, who are overwhelmed by "patients" in a relentless attempt to obtain controlled pharmaceutical drugs.

A large majority of these pharmaceuticals are obtained illegally via fraudulent prescriptions. Drug seekers often steal blank prescription pads and forge the whole document or they alter a legitimate prescription. Another popular method of prescription fraud involves a telephonically called-in prescription to the pharmacy. An abuser poses as a member of a doctor's staff and advises that the doctor has authorized a prescription for a controlled substance. Law enforcement officers are taxed on a daily basis by reports of fraudulent prescriptions being dropped off or phoned-in to area pharmacies.

There are also large organized rings of drug diverters. These individuals operate within a grapevine of friends and associates with whom they buy, sell or trade their prescription drugs. Their drugs are obtained from a variety of sources such as: doctor shopping, prescription fraud, pharmacy robberies or burglaries and they usually have a ready supply.

The scope of the problem of drug diversion goes unrecognized by society as a whole, and is only brought to light by the individual devastation that is felt by families suffering the fallout of the havoc reeked by the abuse of a family member or the fatality of a loved one.

The impact to our community is displayed through many of the standard signs of drug addiction. It enables child abuse and neglect; inability to work or provide for oneself or family; encourages lies, thefts, and burglaries, all the while, touching the lives and resources of our community through the cost of drug courts, rehabilitation centers, jails, emergency medical technicians and law enforcement resources. The fiscal impact can be as crippling to a community as the loss of quality of life. For the past ten years, BSO has been involved with the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators, Inc. (NADDI). This is a unique membership organization whose members are responsible for the investigation and prosecution of pharmaceutical drug diversion. This organization has proven to be a valuable asset to law enforcement, the pharmaceutical industry and health regulatory personnel. NADDI's objective is simple: to improve the members' ability to investigate, and prosecute, pharmaceutical drug diversion.

In May of 2001, the lead investigator of the Broward Sheriff's Office Drug Diversion Unit led Florida by forming the tenth state chapter of N.A.D.D.I. This was established to fill the serious need of education and training in the field of drug diversion in Florida. The Broward Sheriff's Office Drug Diversion Unit, in conjunction with N.A.D.D.I., has training thousands of law enforcement officers, regulatory agents and civilian personnel in the area of pharmaceutical drug diversion investigation and prevention.

The establishment of a Florida chapter of NADDI is an important milestone in the field of drug diversion investigations

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and training for the State of Florida. The development of the Florida chapter is a positive and leading initiative for the Broward Sheriff's Office and the community as a whole. It has initiated a co-operative effort towards the area of drug diversion education and prevention, not only with the federal, state, local and regulatory agencies, but also with many community organizations.

The Broward Sheriff's Office has also aggressively approached many legislative initiatives in the field of drug diversion, by providing the necessary legislative representatives with training and education in the specialized area of pharmaceutical drug diversion. For aggressive developmental changes to be effective, the specific problem areas must first be exposed and defined.

In the last year alone, several new laws have been implemented in Florida regarding the area of drug diversion. The next legislative session will again entertain several new bills that address efforts to curb the abuse and misuse of pharmaceutical drugs.

Here's a look at just a few of the significant cases that define the co-operative efforts of the Broward Sheriff's Office, which have stopped significant amounts of illicit drugs from being filtered into our community.

**1997** - A 46 year-old state licensed doctor was arrested after an eight month undercover operation into his office, during which the doctor supplied prescriptions for scheduled II & III narcotics for cash with no legitimate medical reason. The doctor put approximately 250,000 dose units of narcotics (Lorcet, Percocet, Vicodin, Xanax, etc.) on the street in less than 18 months. The doctor went to trial and was found guilty; he was sentenced to 25 years in state prison. While out on an appellate bond, the subject fled the country and is now a fugitive.

**1999** - A 44 year-old state licensed psychiatrist was arrested along with ten other individuals in connection to a drug trafficking ring (RICO). The psychiatrist, hailed as one of the top "Child, Adolescent and Adult" psychiatrists in the state faces a drug RICO and 122 counts of drug trafficking for supplying a variety of drug dealers with fraudulent prescriptions for scheduled II & III narcotics. There have been four known deaths attributed to the negligent actions of this doctor. It is estimated that the doctor helped put over 500,000 dose units of scheduled II narcotics (Percocet, Dilaudid, Vicodin, etc) on the street during his association with the ring. Eight of the individuals have pled "open" to the court, six score out to life in prison, and all are awaiting sentencing. The doctor is currently in the Broward County jail awaiting trial; he scores out to life in prison.

**1999** - A 61 year-old state licensed physician was arrested for doling out close to three million scheduled II & III narcotics

(Dilaudid, Lorcet, Percocet, Vicodin, Xanax, Tuinal, Seconal, etc) over several years. The doctor's office was considered one of the largest pill-mills in Florida. At least 8 of her patients died from drug over doses using the drugs she prescribed and as many as 30 patients are alleged to have died from abusing a variety of controlled substances. When local pharmacies refused to fill any of her prescriptions she opened a pharmacy in her office. In 1998, the pharmacy was the nation's largest purchaser of secobarbital; and is recorded as doling out 1.9 million dosage units of pharmaceutical controlled substances. The doctor was charged federally with a variety of offenses including insurance fraud; she pled to 13 years of federal prison time.

**2000** - A 39 year-old state licensed nurse was arrested on a variety of charges involving obtaining controlled substances by fraudulent prescriptions, credit card fraud, elderly abuse and grand theft. During the course of the drug investigation, several elderly patients who were assaulted and robbed while they were patients in a local hospital positively identified the subject. The subject would dress in "scrubs" and manipulate her way in local hospitals and rob the elderly patients of cash, credit cards and jewelry. The subject is suspected of numerous other thefts that the victims are to "impaired" to make an identification. The subject pled to 25 years of prison.

**2000** - A 34 year-old medical assistant was arrested for obtaining controlled substances by fraudulent prescriptions and grand theft. It is believed that she supplied her 16-year-old son with Xanax pills to sell at school. She pled open to the court and received drug offender probation. Her son is in a state run juvenile offender program fro selling Xanax at his school.

**2001** - A 62 year-old state licensed registered nurse, who was assigned in the local detention facility, was arrested for practicing medicine without a license and possession of controlled substances when, acting on a tip, detectives discovered that the nurse was selling drugs that she had stolen from the jail dispensary. She is currently pending trial.

**2002** - A 30 year-old state licensed pharmacist, and his 34 year-old female associate, were arrested and charged with multiple counts of trafficking in a variety of pharmaceutical drugs after detectives received information from another law enforcement agency regarding possible fraud. The female would forge prescriptions and present them to the pharmacist, who would in turn bill the prescriptions to unwitting customers insurance plans. This organized operation was in effect for approximately three months before it was discovered. Both subjects are currently pending trial and are facing in excess of 25 years for their crimes.

These cases involve activities that transpired only in Broward County. They do not include any activities that have transpired across Florida, but they do show an increased pattern of organized "cells" of individuals involved in this illegal drug


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*About the author:* Sergeant Steven Santucci has served as a police officer for the Ridgewood, New Jersey Police Department since 1990. He currently serves as the head of the Information Technologies Division. Steve is a graduate of Northwestern University's School of Police Staff and Command, holds a certificate in Advanced Networking from Rutgers University and is a certified computer systems engineer.

Steve is responsible for the public safety computer information systems for the Village of Ridgewood. The Ridgewood public safety network serves not only law enforcement, but fire, EMS and a multi-jurisdictional communications center as well. He supports over 100 users and 70 plus workstations, servers, and mobile computers, all utilizing CAD, RMS, Field reporting and Computer Mapping.

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trade. BSO's Drug Diversion Unit has been alerted to over 15,000 individuals in Broward County over the last ten years that are associated with the abuse of pharmaceutical drug diversion. Many of the individuals surface from one investigation to the next.

Based on this constant activity, law enforcement officials believe that in excess of two million dose units of pharmaceutical controlled substances a year are hitting the streets of Broward County for non-medical or illicit purposes. That amounts to a street price of over ten million dollars a year. It is this pattern of abuse that urges law enforcement and regulatory agencies to alert our legislators that attention must now be paid to the long neglected area of prescription drug abuse. 

*For more information about the Broward County Sheriff's Office Drug Diversion Unit e-mail Det. Lisa McElhaney at [lisa\\_mcelhaney@sheriff.org](mailto:lisa_mcelhaney@sheriff.org).*

## International Mission Information Source

### *Iraq Mission*

**O**n behalf of the United States Department of States, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, DynCorp Aerospace Operations (UK) Ltd. (DAOL), a CSC Company, is seeking individuals with appropriate experience and expertise to participate in an international effort to re-establish police, justice and prison functions in post-conflict Iraq. Interested applicants must be active duty, retired or recently separated sworn police officers, correctional officers or experienced judicial experts. US citizenship is required. If interested, please call toll-free (866) 258-8770 or email [cops.recruiting@dyncorp.com](mailto:cops.recruiting@dyncorp.com) or visit [www.policemission.com](http://www.policemission.com).

#### Qualifications

- US Citizen
- Applicant must have a total of ten (10) years of sworn civilian domestic law enforcement experience.
- Actively serving sworn law enforcement officer, or recently separated sworn law enforcement official (within 5 years but 3 years is preferred).
- Ability to communicate in English.
- Valid US driver's license and ability to operate a standard transmission vehicle.
- Unblemished background.
- Excellent health.
- Valid U.S. passport will be required.

- We are seeking specialized skills - this is not a generalist position.

Additional details will be discussed.

#### How to Apply

If you meet all the requirements for this position and are interested in this challenging assignment, please send us a resume using our *ResumeMaker*. Include special training, assignments and certifications in your resume.

#### To apply, fax your resume to:

Iraq Recruiting  
(817) 737.1608

#### Or mail your resume to:

International Police Program Recruiting - 7th Floor  
6500 West Freeway, Suite 600  
Fort Worth, Texas 76116

Once your resume is received, we will contact you with further details.

**For mission recruiting and status, call our recruiting line: 1 (866) 258.8770.**