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## State Effectively Targets Prescription Drug Trade

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The prescription drug epidemic escalated across the nation about 10 years ago. Sometimes called "hillbilly heroin" - people began prescription drug use to satisfy old drug habits or to start new ones. The epidemic reached to Florida where the startling statistics shocked many. Physicians bought record numbers of one of the prescriptions, oxycodone.

Since then, numbers have significantly decreased as many of the physicians allegedly involved in the prescription drug scandals now face prosecution, are on community supervision or locked up in prison. A combination of intensified efforts of law enforcement and legislation to halt the problem have decreased the attraction of Florida to addicts, dealers or even medical personnel who previously thought the state offered opportunities for prescription drug abuse.

Doctors can no longer sell oxycodone from their practices, pain clinics are tightly regulated, and all controlled substances prescribed in the state are tracked through a database with more than 56 million records loaded into the system since Sept. 2011. Law enforcement used the resource, called the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, more than 20,000 times by the end of 2012.

Pain clinics were previously one of the biggest problems when battling the prescription-drug epidemic. One Orlando doctor was taken into custody in Feb. 2013 for [illegally running a pain clinic](#). In addition, at least 12 pharmacists have been taken into custody since 2010 for their illegal involvement with prescription meds.

Two nationally known chain stores were prohibited by the federal government from selling some prescriptions. A distributor was stopped from shipping some drugs out of its Lakeland location. In another recent investigation, an online pharmacy settled their case for \$40 million to avoid federal charges.

However, law enforcement agencies didn't realize the ramifications of these crackdowns. Now patients with legitimate medical problems struggle to obtain the prescriptions they need in the state. Some pharmacists might exercise an undue amount of caution, which can complicate drug availability. Law enforcement agents guess that some might replace prescriptions with heroin.

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