

Subject: DEA Limits Opioid Production in 2018

Opioid crisis results in restriction of opioid production

You may have seen the headlines about the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) limiting opioid production in 2018. As your Pharmacy Benefit Manager, we wanted to explain what that means for you and your injured workers.

Craig Prince, one of our resident clinical pharmacists, notes: “The DEA has announced that the annual production quota (APQ) for opioids in 2018 will be reduced by 25% from 2017. The 2017 quota was likewise reduced 25% from 2016. The quota reduction partly responds to a reduction in prescriber demand, and survey data that suggest some 6.5 million individuals in the U.S. misuse prescription opioids.¹ The DEA sets the APQ to provide for the adequate and uninterrupted supply of controlled substances (with potential for abuse) to balance legitimate medical need, and the potential for diversion.”

Schedule II opioids affected by the restriction

The reduction would be in schedule II opioid painkillers (oxycodone, hydrocodone, oxymorphone, hydromorphone, morphine, codeine, meperidine, and fentanyl). There has been a steady decrease in sales of these medications. The DEA attributes this trend to the expanding use of prescription drug monitoring programs that are mandatory in some states.

What does this mean to you?

First Script and our clients have consistently seen reductions in opioid usage due to the various programs we have put in place to monitor their use. This production reduction should not affect access to these medications for your injured workers still utilizing these therapies. The amount of drugs produced in 2018 will include a surplus for incidentals. Also, if the market has a true higher demand for opioids in 2018, the DEA can reverse its decision and increase the quota for production.

The upcoming First Script newsletter will feature a special piece from Nikki Wilson, Director of Pharmacy Product Development, where she will address this topic more in-depth.

For more information, please contact your Account Manager or Account Pharmacist.

¹The 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that 6.5 million Americans over the age of 12 years used controlled prescription medicines non-medically during the past month, second only to marijuana and more than past-month users of cocaine, heroin, and hallucinogens combined.