



**Hospital Synopsis**  
**Safe Medication Distribution on Long Island**  
**Submitted by Sarah Solomon, PULSE of NY**  
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**Problem:**

Long Island Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependency (LICADD) and PULSE Patient Safety Advisory Council are working to reduce the drug problem on Long Island through education of medication use and drug disposal.

According to a recent Newsday article<sup>(1)</sup>, 2008 had the highest incidence of heroin deaths in Nassau County. Between 2004 and 2008 at least 1,068 people on Long Island lost their lives to overdoses of heroin or prescribed narcotics. In 2007 10,418 people were admitted to rehab facilities.

Although there are no known statistics as to what this is costing taxpayers for emergency medical response, we can be certain that the use of heroin and other narcotics is contributing to health care costs, as well as affecting the lives and livelihoods of our local communities.

PULSE of NY, Patient Safety Advisory Council is focusing on health literacy and the education that goes along to patients at the time they are prescribed medication.

PULSE of NY gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of North Shore- LIJ, Huntington Hospital for their support and participation.

**Observation by Sarah Solomon, PULSE of NY:**

Over the past two weeks I have been working at Huntington Hospital observing patient discharges upon their departure from the hospital. My focus was to observe the dialogue between the patient and doctor during the discharge process. While observing the discharge, I was listening for questions by the medical professional regarding the types of medications that were being prescribed, the disposal and storage of these medications, and the potential addictions that can occur from the abuse of painkillers and narcotics. My observations have led me to the conclusion that possible methods of disposal, storage, as well as the potential addictions of painkillers are not being addressed during the discharge process.

After the discharge discussion was complete, I then asked the patients permission to conduct an interview regarding their comprehension of the discharge process. During the patient reflection I asked several questions such as:

1. What new medications, if any, have you been prescribed?
2. From those medications, which are painkillers?
3. How will you store the medications?
4. How will you dispose of the medication?

These interviews have been very informative and have revealed the average patients' lack of knowledge of how to store and dispose of old medications, especially painkillers. One patient conveyed that she has had all of her pain medications stolen from her at a recent party in her home. She added that in the future she will store her medications in a less obvious location. All of the patients had no knowledge of proper disposal of old medications that they no longer take or need. If the medications are not properly disposed of, the risk of potential abuse becomes much greater. One patient firmly stated that all of the questions I asked during our interview should always be asked by the physician during the discharge process. The addition of these questions to the discharge process will give the patient more knowledge and assurance when leaving the hospital.

**Recommendations:**

Anyone (nurse, doctor, pharmacist) should be required to discuss with anyone they are recommending narcotics to, to discuss the following items:

- Does the patient understand the medications being prescribed and that they can be potentially addicting,
- Does the patient understand that the narcotic (or other addictive medication) should not be easily accessible to others in the home?
- Does the patient understand appropriate disposal of medication?

Additional Focus Groups:

- To develop a best practice and patient centered dialogue,
- To learn what patients are hearing and understanding when picking up medications.

Dates for focus groups and community education programs are scheduled for August 2010.

- Develop an Island wide campaign to encourage patients' understanding at the time of distribution of the potential for abuse by themselves or others to also include storage and appropriate disposal. (To begin September with Farmingdale College Advertising Class)

(1) <http://www.newsday.com/heartbreak-of-addiction-hits-home-1.1244876?qr=1>