‘Doctor shopping’ by opioid addicts targeted in state bill

By Melissa Healy
TribuneNewsService

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and guns and other firearms cause the deaths of more children in the United States each year than the flu or asthma, according to a comprehensive new report on gun violence and kids.

Each day in the United States, an average of 3.5 people younger than 18 are shot to death and another 15 are treated in a hospital emergency department for a gunshot wound. Between 2012 and 2014, an average of 1,267 children and adolescents died each year as a result of gun violence, making firearms second only to motor vehicle crashes as a cause of injury-related deaths. Another 5,790 were treated for gunshot injuries in U.S. hospitals.

Here’s another way to look at it: In the United States, a gun is the cause of death for more than 1 in 10 children.

The number of child fatalities related to guns is far higher in the U.S. than in any other high-income country. Another study has concluded that the U.S. accounts for 96 percent of all the firearms-related deaths of children younger than 14 in the world’s 23 richest countries.

The new analysis, published last week in the journal Pediatrics, represents an unusually comprehensive look at the toll that guns take on children. It draws from federal databases of injuries and deaths, hospital records, and an effort launched in 2003 to track violent deaths and the circumstances surrounding them in at least 17 states so far.

The majority of the nearly 1,300 children killed in gun-related incidents each year are boys ages 0-12. In homicides, which represent an average of 55 percent of annual gun-related deaths among children, African-American youths are the most likely victims.

Indeed, African-American children were found to have the highest rates of death by gunfire — 4.1 per 100,000 between 2012 and 2014 — of any ethnic group counted. That’s a major reason why the annual rate of homicide fatalities for African-American children (2.2 per 100,000), black children’s rate of firearm-related fatalities was four times higher than the rate for Latino children (0.5 per 100,000), and roughly 10 times higher than the rate for white children and Native-American children (0.4 per 100,000).

Between 2010 and 2014, the states with the highest rates of firearm-related homicide among children were largely concentrated in the South: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee. Other states near the top of the list included four in the Midwest (Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan and Ohio), two in the West (California and Nevada), and three in the Northeast (Connecticut, Maryland and Pennsylvania).

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‘We have doctors and pharmacists who are willing to prescribe and fill medications for patients with no medical need and patients actively seeking out these types of doctors to illegally obtain prescription medicine.”

Sara Tschackert

The proposal required for health providers to use the recently upgraded Michigan Automated Prescription System would take effect in 2020, with exceptions for inpatient, emergency, and ultimate losing their license under some circumstances.

Michigan currently has a system that tracks prescriptions, but many physicians don’t use it properly or even at all.

Doctors would be required to check a prescription database before prescribing opioids and other powerful drugs, under legislation approved Thursday by the Michigan Senate. The bills, which were sent to the House, are lawmakers’ latest effort to combat a deadly opioid epidemic in a state with the 10th-highest rate of opioid pain reliever prescriptions, which were sent to the House, are lawmakers’ latest effort to target “doctor shopping” by addicts.

The bills also would limit the amount of opioids that can be prescribed and require a “true blue” physician-patient relationship to dispense drugs. The measure, which now sent to the House, is lawmakers’ latest effort to combat a deadly opioid epidemic in a state with the 10th-highest rate of opioid prescriptions.

The state would better analyze the monitoring data in the database, they could face disciplinary action — such as being referred to a team about opioid abuse and ultimately losing their license under some circumstances.

Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker (R-Lake Odessa) said the legislation, if adopted, would result in a reduction of opioid prescriptions in Michigan, she said.

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