Prescription Drugs Need Careful Handling

Certified athletic trainers in the collegiate setting either have already or will at some point find themselves dealing with the management of prescription drugs in their facilities.

But do they know the state and federal guidelines for managing those medications?

"It's an issue that I think some athletic trainers may not be aware of," said Ron Courson, ATC, PT, NREMT-I, chair of the College/University Athletic Trainers' Committee. "Some of these regulations are new, and many time, people just keep doing things the way they've always been done. As ATCs, we must ensure we are following state and federal guidelines regarding prescription medicines."

Robert Nickell, president and CEO of SportPharm, Inc., has taken an active interest in helping sports medicine professionals properly receive, store and record prescription drugs. His prescription management service has made handling prescriptions much clearer, said Russ Romano, head athletic trainer at the University of Southern California, which began using SportPharm's system four years ago.

As part of their compliance plan, the USC sports medicine department registered with the Drug Enforcement Administration. The DEA certificate designates the athletic training medical office as an extension of the team physician's private practice office, thereby making it a licensed facility to which a licensed drug repackager may send properly labeled prescription drugs.

Record keeping, Romano said, is dramatically improved.

"It's like balancing a checkbook: we keep track of everything that comes in, and once a month we audit ourselves to make sure we know how all of it has gone out," Romano explained.

Becoming compliant – even knowing what rules to comply with – was not easy. A literature search turned up little information, Romano said, and conventional wisdom was replete with details about who can dispense prescription medicine but lacking in knowledge of the proper handling of such drugs.

Nickell said the regulations governing prescription medications are dynamic, making compliance an ongoing effort. Since many of the laws are new, some physicians may not be up-to-date – and certified athletic trainers may not be, either.

"The bottom line is that if they're going to have a sports medicine department, the physician must be responsible for medications," Nickell said. "The area where medications are received and stored must be licensed, and protocols must be followed. Many organizations are starting that process, they're running it loosely or they're not doing anything at all. It's an evolutionary process."

tips for prescription medicine compliance

Nickell offered tips for managing prescription drugs:

1. Any medical office that orders, receives, stores, dispenses or administers controlled substances must have a separate DEA certification registration showing the exact physical address of the ATMO™, or Athletic Training Medical Office.
2. All medications must be locked and secure at all times.
3. If medications are dispensed in the ATMO, they must be labeled accurately and contain the minimum following information:
   – Name of physician and manufacturer
   – Name and address of ATMO
   – Athlete's name
   – Date of service
   – Name, expiration date and directions for use of medication
   – Lot number
   – Strength, dosage form and quantity
4. State and federal laws mandate that medication records must be retained for a period of three years.
5. Accurate and readily retrievable records must be kept of the acquisition and disposition of prescription drugs entering and leaving the ATMO.
6. Since the medical staff is not employed by the physician, an "agency" is required in writing, signed by the physician, specifically stating the duties and responsibilities of his or her athletic medical staff.
7. Sample medications must be tracked according to receipt of entry, dispensation or administration, and disposal. A separate acquisition and disposition record must be maintained for all sample medications.
8. In some states – such as Ohio, Texas and Florida – separate state licensure is required for each location where the physician practices medicine and dispenses and administers medications.
9. At NO TIME should expired medications, whether over-the-counter or prescription, be in the ATMO. If any are discovered, they should be quarantined, properly recorded, and returned to an agency duly authorized to destroy such medications.
10. Only FDA-licensed facilities are authorized to repackage medications. A repackaged medication is not yet ready for the end user. A dispensed medication is given to the end user. nn

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