

JUST SAY NO

Despite the fact that pseudoephedrine and phenylpropranolamine are being used in clandestine labs to manufacture methamphetamines, sales of these over-the-counter drugs remain virtually unregulated. Federal lawmakers have introduced legislation to curb this illegal drug production, but there are pharmacists who don't want to wait for the laws to take effect. They believe they can take a bite out of crime by exercising control over the OTC sales in their own pharmacies.

The Pharmacy Defense Fund, in conjunction with Pharmacists Planning Service Inc. (PPSI), Sausalito, Calif., and the Pharmacy Councils on Mental Health, Alcohol Abuse & Tobacco Dependence, is sponsoring a campaign to keep all pseudoephedrine, ephedrine, phenylpropranolamine, and nicotine patches and gum behind the counter.

The organizations recently mailed 40,000 informational kits to independent pharmacies across the nation, asking them to keep these drugs behind the counter in the interest of public health and safety. The kits include information about the growing methamphetamine problem plaguing the country, proposed legislation to fight this threat, and two posters for R.Ph.s to display in their pharmacies. The posters inform customers that these OTCs have been removed from the shelves in an effort to protect their communities from drug abuse. Customers can buy these products with the assistance of the pharmacist or another health professional.

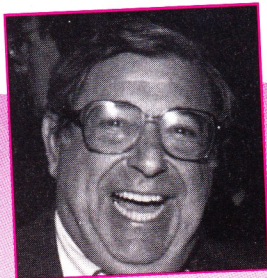
"We are a nonprofit consumer, public health, and pharmacy education foundation declaring this a public health emergency," commented Fred Mayer, Pharm.D., president of PPSI. He said he believes action

Pharmacists try to keep drugs out of the hands of dealers

needs to be taken even before legislation takes effect.

Senators Orrin Hatch (R, Utah), Joseph Biden (D, Del.), Dianne Feinstein (D, Calif.), Charles Grassley (R, Iowa), Ron Wyden (D, Ore.), and

Tom Harkin (D, Iowa) have introduced the Comprehensive Methamphetamine Control Act of 1996 in an effort to restrict access to certain precursor chemicals used to make methamphetamines (see story on page 97). Buyers would have to provide their names, addresses, and other pertinent information at



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the time of sale. Companies who sell chemicals used to make these drugs could be fined up to \$250,000 or shut down for up to 10 years. Retail sales of pseudoephedrine would be limited to no more than 48 grams.

The senators and PPSI cited incidents in California as examples of a dangerous trend. A Kmart pharmacy in Chula Vista, Calif., allegedly sold 20,000 pseudoephedrine tablets to one person, and Wal-Mart pharmacies in Chula Vista and Santee, Calif., allegedly sold 100,000 tablets each to individuals. Kmart's spokeswoman would not comment on this matter or on any procedures the company may have in place to prevent such sales. Wal-Mart could not be reached for comment.

Mayer has directed this campaign

toward independent pharmacies because, he said, they have the freedom to run their stores as they please; chain pharmacies, however, must clear such actions with headquarters. Mayer hopes most independent pharmacists will comply with his proposal.

Mayer said he has also written to John Young, chairman of the California Association of Retailers and to Ron Ziegler, president and CEO of the National Association of Chain Drugstores, requesting their support in this effort, as well.

But will customers be annoyed that they have to ask for these OTCs? Arnold Vasa, R.Ph., a v.p. with PPSI, believes people will understand that pharmacists have patients' best interests at heart. "You can't let the customers be turned off. You have to talk to them and give them a reason. Most people are receptive to information like that," said Vasa.

PPSI is not the only pharmacy organization trying to bring about change. The California Pharmacists Association also wants to work with Sen. Feinstein to regulate all sales of pseudoephedrine in the state. Robert P. Marshall, Pharm.D., CEO of the association, said he would like all retail outlets, including supermarkets and mass-merchandisers, to take these products off their shelves. "You have really accomplished nothing," he said, if only independent pharmacies and chain drugstores have put these products behind the counter.

Like Mayer, Marshall believes that a public relations campaign will work more quickly than legislation to solve the problem. He believes pharmacists can make a difference if they are approached correctly. "We have got to make sure that we clearly communicate the cause of the problem and how they can help. It's going to be hard for most pharmacists to understand that [it must be] a broad effort to do any good. We have to take the time to do this right and coordinate it so every pharmacy understands that the pharmacy and the convenience store down the street are involved," said Marshall.

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