

# Hospitals Take Average of 18 Months to Detect Addicted Employee Theft and Misuse of Controlled Substances

Protenus releases new report on the impact of drug diversion on healthcare employees and patients

BALTIMORE --Protenus, a compliance analytics platform that uses artificial intelligence to find anomalous behavior in our nation's leading health systems, today announced new research that details the effects of the opioid crisis on healthcare workers and patients. As our national conversation about opioid abuse continues, the effects of this epidemic on healthcare workers, who have easy access to these painkillers, remain underreported.

The research, published in the Drug Diversion Digest, is the first report of its kind to compile and analyze an array of data regarding publicly available clinical drug diversion incidents involving healthcare workers.

Unsurprisingly, 92% of diversion incidents involved at least one opioid.

Drug diversion is the technical term for theft, misuse or tampering of controlled substances meant for legitimate clinical use. It can include pocketing pills meant for patients, manipulating drug dispensing cabinets, or tampering with syringes filled with opioids. Extreme examples include a nurse who admitted to installing an IV port on her ankle to inject herself with opioids.

The report also details at least one incident in which an anesthesiology resident self-administered a lethal dose of fentanyl. According to the NCBI, as much as 10 to 15% of all healthcare professionals will misuse drugs or alcohol at some point during their careers. Given the highly addictive nature of these controlled substances, it is now just as dangerous to be anesthesiology resident working in a hospital as it is to be a police officer or firefighter.

“Our mission at Protenus has always been to empower health systems to deliver care that respects the safety and dignity of patients and employees,” said Nick Culbertson, Co-founder and CEO of Protenus. “The technology exists to shift drug diversion monitoring from a reactive to proactive approach – we can provide hospital leaders the ability to tackle this issue head-on, instead of reacting to issues after it’s too late. We hope this report will help health systems to not only better protect their patients, but also to help members of their workforce who might be battling addiction.”

Fueling this epidemic in healthcare is not only the high-stress nature of many healthcare jobs, but also poorly supervised access to pharmaceuticals. Healthcare staff work daily with some of the most powerful narcotics available, know the control systems in place at their facility, and how to avoid them. This could be why it takes an average of 18 months for hospitals to catch diverters, according to the Drug Diversion Digest. The longest running incident of drug diversion reported in 2017 went on for twelve years.

For the report, Protenus analyzed 365 diversion incidents reported in news stories. These incidents were reported at various stages, including incident discovery, accusations, arrests, charging, and sentencing of diverters. The report found \$301.1M in prescription fraud and controlled substances was lost as a direct result of drug diversion, and given the limited proportion of cases for which this type of information is available, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Healthcare systems do their best to monitor for drug diversion incidents. However, they are limited by current detection methods, which rely on heavily manual processes. Dedicated teams are forced to analyze phonebook-sized access logs each month looking for possible drug diversion incidents, or use simple reports that don’t recognize most types of suspicious activity.

It has been nearly impossible to get a full picture of the scope of drug diversion, outside of private databases, as aggregated data has not been publicly available in a single location until this report. Through looking at the complete picture, for instance, this research shows us that nurses are among the most vulnerable groups to opioid addiction, as nearly 50% of drug

diversion incidents involved nurses, with the second largest category being doctors.

The Drug Diversion Digest was created to equip healthcare leaders with new insight into this critical challenge facing healthcare, adding a tool to help them advocate for resources, take steps to better protect members of their workforce who might be vulnerable to controlled substance abuse, and prevent harm to patients.

“This report sheds light on one of the darkest corners of healthcare – a blind spot that is quite literally killing our patients and providers. Healthcare workforce members’ addiction to powerful drugs, like fentanyl or hydrocodone, not only puts themselves at risk, but also the patients under their care. With efforts like the Drug Diversion Digest, Protenus is working to empower diversion specialists, help them understand the scope of this issue in their peer institutions, and build a more powerful national dialogue on how we can tackle these challenges together,” said Robert Lord, Co-founder and President of Protenus.

Moving forward in 2018, Protenus will publish a regular update to the Drug Diversion Digest that will include newly available data, and expand the scope of this inaugural report as trends become discernible over time.

## About Protenus

The Protenus healthcare compliance analytics platform uses artificial intelligence to audit every access to patient records for the nation's leading health systems. Providing healthcare leaders full insight into how health data is being used, and alerting privacy, security and compliance teams to inappropriate activity, Protenus helps our partner hospitals make decisions about how to better protect their data, their patients, and their institutions. Learn more at [Protenus.com](http://Protenus.com) and follow us on Twitter @Protenus.

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