

June 14, 2017

Chairman Stephen Huffman  
Vice Chair Theresa Gavarone  
Ranking Member Nickie Antonio  
Health Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives  
c/o Chairman Stephen Huffman  
77 S. High Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215

Written Testimony Submitted in Support of HB 231: "To enact section 3719.051 of the Revised Code to require pharmacists to offer to dispense controlled substances in lockable or tamper-evident containers."

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. I am a Professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research & Policy. Our center is one of ten centers for excellence in injury research in the United States, and our mission is to reduce injuries, including poisonings, by creating and disseminating new knowledge about what works. The opinions expressed herein are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

The opioid epidemic is complex, and we have many tools in our public health toolkit to address it. Ohio has taken a number of important steps to reducing prescription pain medication misuse, abuse, addiction, and overdose. This legislation is one more step that can reduce access to opioids by unauthorized users.

Let me share some data from our research and that of others to help inform your decisions today. I will cover four points:

1. Access opioid pain medications
2. National recommendations for improved packaging
3. Effectiveness of improved packaging
4. Data needs

There is widespread access to opioid pain medications, largely stored unsafely in homes, and limited public information about safe storage and disposal. We conducted a national survey of adults who had been prescribed an opioid in the year prior to the survey. Only 9% of our 1032 respondents reported storing the medication in a locked place; 57% had or planned to have leftover pills, and almost one-half of these people said they would keep them for future use. Among the 681 families who had children living in the home, only 12% of those with children ages 7-17 stored their pills in a locked place. These findings are important because we know from the National Survey on Drug Use & Health that pilfering from family and friends is frequently where young people get these drugs. In 2015, more than 50% of the 969,000 12-17 year olds who reported misusing a prescription pain reliever said they got it from a friend or relative, and 9% said they took the pills without asking. This is almost twice the proportion that reported buying pills from a drug dealer (5%).

Improved packaging has been recommended by a distinguished national group of experts. The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health recently convened a group of nationally renowned experts on prescription drug misuse, abuse, addiction, and overdose to review the state of the science on the opioid problem. In our November 2015 Report: "The Prescription Opioid Epidemic: An Evidence Based Approach", which I have brought for you today and is available on line<sup>1</sup>, we reviewed the scope of the problem and potential policy and programmatic solutions. The recommendations regarding engineering solutions to the problem call for improved packaging designs that restrict access only to those for whom the medications are prescribed. Locking pill vials and tamper resistant containers are viable options to address that need. There are a number of engineering groups, including us at Hopkins<sup>2</sup>, who are working on technologies with features such as finger print technology and enhanced tamper resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-drug-safety-and-effectiveness/opioid-epidemic-town-hall-2015/2015-prescription-opioid-epidemic-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eec77pAps7c>

Improved packaging is potentially very effective in reducing unauthorized access. The Poison Prevention Packaging Act (PPPA) established the regulations governing child resistant packaging standards in 1970, over 45 years ago. The PPPA's regulations, which require only that 85% of test subjects aged 5 or younger cannot open the container, are ineffective in preventing pilfering by young people who are experimenting and using drugs recreationally, often with tragic consequences. The highly addictive nature of prescription pain medications and the potential for teens to use them in combination with alcohol leads to problems of addiction or worse, overdose. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that in 2015, 11% of 12-17 year olds who reported misuse of prescription pain medications also reported heavy drinking (including binge drinking) in the prior month, a rate that is more than twice that reported by those over 18 years of age (4%). Preventing access to dangerous substances has a proven effect in injury prevention and on improved public health outcomes. Studies of the Poison Prevention Packaging Act's impact in the early 1970's attributed a 45% reduction in child mortality to the legislation, primarily through the reduction of child overdoses on aspirin. With today's significantly stronger and more addictive medications that can be readily accessed by anyone over the age of 5, the time has come for more secure packaging as part of the solution to this public health epidemic.

More data are needed to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of improved packaging. While the prescription drug abuse and opioid epidemics are complex problems requiring a combination of policy solutions, we believe that improved packaging is an important piece of the policy prescription, and believe that it will make a significant difference in Ohio's public health outcomes. But, as a scientist, I have to emphasize that believing something is not enough. We need rigorous studies of the impact of improved packaging on unauthorized access, and ultimately on overdoses and new cases of addiction.

There is great promise in improved technology, and we should invest in finding out how to best use it to protect the public from the largely preventable opioid epidemic that is ravaging our communities.

Sincerely,

Andrea C. Gielen, ScD, ScM  
Professor and Director  
Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy