

'CLANDESTINE METHAMPHETAMINE LABORATORIES: THE ROLE OF THE "PSEUDO-RUNNER"

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Introduction and Aims: Queensland, Australia is considered the 'production capital' for methamphetamine. "Pseudo-running" occurs when one person or several people purchase legal amounts of pseudoephedrine from pharmacies and aggregate the purchases to create a batch of methamphetamine. For the first time, this study presents Queensland estimates of: pseudo-runners, pseudoephedrine-based medication transactions, pharmacies visited and distanced travelled: providing a geo-spatial analysis of the Queensland pseudo-runner.

Design and Methods: Suspected pseudo-runners were analyzed using de-identified data from pharmacy mandatory recording of pseudoephedrine based medication transactions: from 2005 to 2013. Pseudo-runners were identified based on a conservative annual transaction history of 21 or more per individual. Standard descriptive statistics, a time series analysis using Joinpoint regression software and ArcGIS were undertaken.

Results: There were 3149 individuals suspected of pseudo- running in Queensland across the period. The maximum number of pharmacies visited in any one year ranged between 19 and 132. Using geo-spatial analysis, one pseudo-runner undertook 11 transactions in one day at 9 pharmacies (two accessed twice) covering a distance of 153kms.

Discussion and Conclusions: One of the reasons for the increased numbers of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in Queensland (and elsewhere) is that methamphetamine is relatively cheap and easy to make, the ingredients needed for production are commonly available and laboratories can be moved easily and set up in other locations. This research helps to provide new and important evidence on the role of pharmacies, pharmacists and pseudo-runners in the diversion of pseudoephedrine-based medication to clan labs. This research will provide much needed evidence to help inform pharmaceutical regulations for pseudoephedrine-based medications.

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