

LEGISLATION IMPOSING LIMITS ON DIRECT DISPENSING OF MEDICATIONS TO INJURED WORKERS BY PHYSICIANS BECOMES LAW IN PENNSYLVANIA

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On October 27th, Governor Tom Corbett signed into law House Bill 1846, which will limit the practice of physicians dispensing drugs directly to injured workers. A recent front page article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* by Don Saptkin highlighted the significant costs Pennsylvania employers were bearing from this practice. (http://articles.philly.com/2014-09-24/news/54244407_1_comp-law-comp-expenses-workers-compensation-research-institute). According to the Workers' Compensation Research Institute, physician-dispensed medications accounted for 29% of all prescriptions in workers' compensation, about 48% of all prescription costs. The Drug Enforcement Administration found that nine of the top 25 practitioner purchasers of Oxycodone products who dispensed them directly to patients nationwide were located in Pennsylvania. Medications, such as Oxycontin and Oxycodone, are being prescribed to injured workers for pain. The addictive nature of opioids has contributed to a substantial rise in overdose deaths nationally.

The bill will limit dispensing of medications to 30 days, or seven days for more serious drugs, from an injured worker's first treatment with a health care provider. This limitation is longer than the period allowed for in states such as New York, where the period is three days, and New Jersey, where the period is seven. The law will not limit prescriptions by a physician, nor prohibit dispensing of

drugs by an outpatient provider. Immediate access to medication will be available to the injured worker if deemed necessary by the treating physician.

Governor Corbett described the bill as an equitable one that preserves the doctor/patient relationship and, at the same time, protects employers from paying a higher cost for drugs dispensed by a physician compared to the same drugs dispensed at a pharmacy. It is projected that the bill will save employers \$13 million annually. ■



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