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Health Care   Government

## Gov. Tom Wolf signs off on opioid-related laws

By **Lenay Ruhl**, November 2, 2016 at 2:58 PM



(Photo / Thinkstock)

Medical schools will be the first facet of the health care industry to feel the impact of new opioid-related laws in Pennsylvania.

Gov. Tom Wolf on Wednesday signed a **package of five bills** changing how the health care industry handles opioid pain pills, and, effective immediately, medical schools will have to update their curriculum.

Medical schools will have to teach current, age-appropriate information related to pain management, alternatives to opioid pain medications, instructions on safe prescription methods and information on how to identify patients at risk of addiction.

Medical students will also need training on managing patients who suffer from the chronic disease of substance use disorder.

Another bill signed Wednesday will limit minors to seven-day prescriptions of opioid pain pills and require physicians to take a number of steps before issuing the first prescription. The law will go into effect as soon as the Pennsylvania Department of State publishes a form for doctors to fill out when prescribing opioids to minors.

The remaining three bills that Wolf signed will go into effect 60 days from Nov. 2.

Those bills will impact physicians working in hospital emergency departments, as they will be limited on how many opioid pain pills they can give to patients.

Additionally, physicians across the commonwealth will have to check Pennsylvania's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program every time they prescribe opioid pain pills to a patient, no matter the patient's age or medical history.

The state's prescription drug monitoring program, which went live in August, tracks opioid pain pills and other controlled substances to better control the misuse and over-prescribing of addictive medications.




Another update to the monitoring program in the legislation will require pharmacies to enter opioid prescription data within 24 hours of filling prescriptions, instead of the 72 hour window the current law allows for.

And finally, the package of legislation will establish health care facilities across the state – hospitals, medical practices, pharmacies – as a drop-off locations for unused or left-over prescription pain medication.

The bill signing took place in Harrisburg at 2 p.m., with a bi-partisan crowd gathering in the Capitol rotunda to formally recognize what the governor promises to be the first of many efforts to combat the heroin and opioid pain pill epidemic – “a public health crisis,” Wolf said.

“We all understand we have more to do,” Wolf said.

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