



Survey Results

Controlled Substance Abuse in Maryland Animal Hospitals

ANALYSIS

The Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA) conducted a survey of 2,242 practicing veterinarians licensed in the state of Maryland. Responses totaled 561 (25%) of licensed veterinarians in our state representing all 24 counties.

There are three ways for veterinarians to provide medication to their patients:

1

Administer: this occurs in the hospital environment. The veterinarian gives the medication directly to the patient. The most common reason veterinarians would administer controlled substances to a patient would be for perioperative pain management, sedation, anesthesia or seizure control. Administered controlled substances are regulated by the DEA and additional oversight provided by the Suspicious Order Monitoring System

2

Dispense: The veterinarian fills the prescribed medication from within hospital medication stock and the animal owner is given the medicine to take home and administer to the patient. There is no prescription or pharmacy involvement. Dispensing of controlled substances are regulated by the DEA and additional oversight provided by the Suspicious Order Monitoring System

3

Prescribe: The veterinarian gives the animal owner a prescription to be filled at a local pharmacy. Pet owners do not receive the medications directly from the the animal hospital. Controlled substances prescribed by pharmacies are already subject to PDMP reporting.

The results of our study of licensed veterinarians in Maryland found that 91% of respondents administer controlled substances and when necessary 76% of respondents prescribe controlled substances. 66% of respondents DISPENSE controlled substances.

Schedule II Medications: High Potential for Abuse or Addiction

The most commonly dispensed type of Schedule II Medication is Hydrocodone a medication commonly used to reduce coughing in dogs and commonly combined with Homatropine Bromide which reduces diversion and abuse potential by humans. This combination will cause the patient to get sleepy which reduces the ability for humans to abuse it.

The most common duration of a dispensed controlled substance is 4 to 7 days. Of the 561 respondents to our survey, ONLY 27% dispense any Schedule II medications listed on the survey.

Schedule III Medications: Moderate to Low Potential for Dependence

The most commonly dispensed type of Schedule III Medication is Buprenorphine. Of the 561 respondents to our survey, 56% dispense any Schedule III medications listed on the survey. Like Schedule II medications, the most common duration of a Schedule III medications is 4 to 7 days.

Schedule IV Medications: Low Potential for Abuse and/or Dependence

The most commonly dispensed Schedule IV Medication is Phenobarbital (used to control seizures). This is the only schedule of controlled substance medication on the list that a majority of survey respondents report dispensing with a duration of 8 or more days.

Of the 561 respondents to our survey, 56% dispense any Schedule IV medications listed on the survey. This group of medications is most commonly used for chronic conditions and is the medication class of the least abuse potential for humans.

Inventory Control Measures

All respondents have some inventory control measures in place, including locked medication safes, controlled substance logs, bottle counting, and surveillance cameras.

Abuse of Animal or Animal's Medications

In the past 5 years, 96% of respondents reported no suspicion of a client hurting their animal in order to get a controlled substance, 60% of respondents have never had a suspicion of a client using their animal's controlled substance for themselves.

We believe the response shows Maryland Veterinarians take seriously the concern of diversion and are cognizant of abuse potential.



CONCLUSION

This data demonstrates that Maryland veterinarians are cautious and responsible when dispensing controlled substances, especially Schedule II Medications with the highest potential for addiction (Schedule I substances are not used).

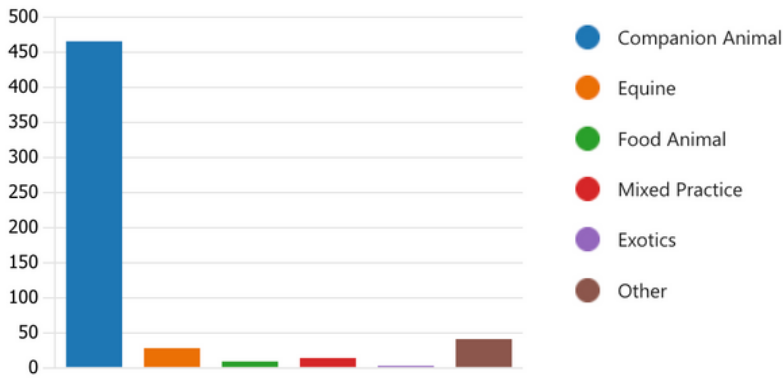
Controlled substance inventory is well-managed with multi-layered internal systems and monitored access. All controlled substance use either dispensed, administered or prescribed is regulated by the DEA and the Suspicious Order Monitoring System.

Our survey findings align with national survey data that shows veterinary prescribing to be a de minimus source of scheduled medications.

MDVMA feels the exemption provided to veterinarians from PDMP reporting makes sense and aligns Maryland with the majority (35 states) that have specifically exempted veterinarians from PDMP.

Eleven (11) of the thirty-five (35) states that presently exempt veterinarians originally required reporting of veterinarians and later requested that veterinarians be removed from the PDMP reporting requirement.

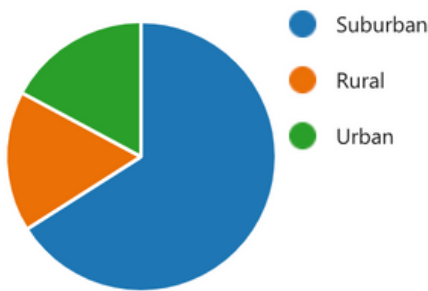
Primary area of veterinary practice:



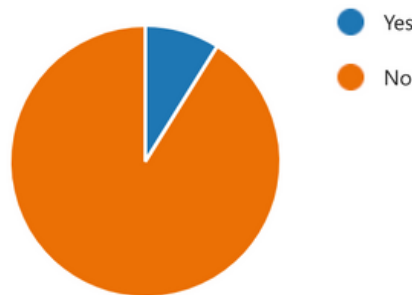
Implemented inventory control measures (most common to least common):

- Controlled substance logs
- Locked drug safe
- Bottle counting
- Bottles/vials reconciled when new one is opened
- Staff education
- Surveillance cameras
- Locked doors
- Daily to weekly inventory counts
- Buddy system required for access
- Background checks
- Automated pharmacy dispenser with fingerprint access
- Drug testing employees
- Other control measures in place

Practice setting:



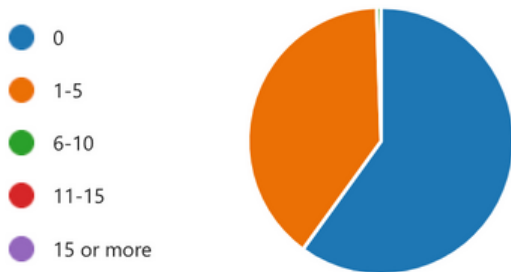
Discrepancies in controlled substance inventory:



ZERO respondents have no control measure in place.

Number of cases in the last 5 years where client suspected of misusing pet's controlled substance for themselves or diversion:

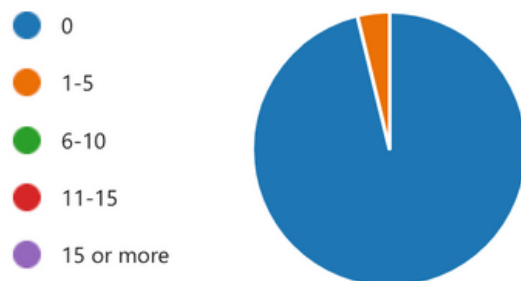
Examples are: seeking prescriptions for multiple pets for a very specific but uncommon problem, claiming a specific illness without the presence of any symptoms, requesting specific medication by name, insisting on refills without a recheck, repetitive "vet shopping."



Who has access to the controlled substance inventory?

- 37% of veterinarians report that only veterinarians have access to controlled substances in their practices.
- 63% report that techs, CVTs, RVTs, hospital managers, surgical assistants, etc. also have access to controlled substances.

Number of cases in the last 5 years where a suspected client has intentionally harmed their animal to obtain controlled substances:



DEA Schedule II – High Potential for Abuse or Addiction.

Answer Choices:	Hydrocodone*	Hydromorphone	Fentanyl
Administer only	26%	45%	21%
Prescribe	55%	2%	5%
Dispense	35%	1%	4%

Dispensing Duration:

14% of respondents who dispense Schedule II medications do so for 1-3 days

29% of respondents who dispense Schedule II medications do so for 4-7 days

17.5% of respondents who dispense Schedule II medications do so for 8 or more days.

39.5% do not dispense Schedule II medications.

Hydrocodone An opioid with minimal proof/use as a pain medication in veterinary patients. Predominantly used in combination with homatropine to prevent abuse. Given this and being more potent for coughing/collapsing trachea in dogs than codeine, it is predominantly prescribed or dispensed. Can be a chronic use medication in certain situations.

Plumb DC. Hydrocodone. [Plumb's Veterinary Drugs](#). Monograph updated May 2022. Accessed January 26, 2024

DEA Schedule III – Pharmaceuticals with much less potential for abuse and addiction.

Answer Choices:	Buprenorphine*	Codeine
Administer only	79%	15%
Prescribe	44%	27%
Dispense	52%	15%

Dispensing Duration:

39.5% of respondents who dispense Schedule III medications do so for 1-3 days

41% of respondents who dispense Schedule III medications do so for 4-7 days

4.5% of respondents who dispense Schedule III medications do for 8 or more days.

15% of respondents do not dispense Schedule III medications.

Buprenorphine: An opioid used as an injectable and oral pain medication, predominantly in cats. It is for short term use, following surgery or injury. Newer forms have been FDA approved for one-time topical administration in cats for post-surgery pain control. Further reducing current and future dispensing in favor of in-hospital administration. This is more practical as it removes the owner from having to give pain medication at home. Anecdotally, prescribing for picking up through a pharmacy has been difficult for most veterinary prescribers due to human use and DEA regulations.

Plumb DC. Buprenorphine. [Plumb's Veterinary Drugs](#). Monograph updated February 2022. Accessed January 26, 2024

“Zorbium® (Buprenorphine Transdermal Solution) for Cats.” [Zorbium® \(Buprenorphine Transdermal Solution\) for Cats](#), Accessed 26 Jan. 2024.

DEA Schedule IV – Therapeutic substances with an even lower potential for abuse, with a wide variety of therapeutic use.

Answer Choices:	Butorphenol*	Tramadol	Phenobarbital*	Diazepam*	Alprazolam*
Administer only	42%	32%	43%	54%	17%
Prescribe	5%	37%	61%	17%	33%
Dispense	3%	32%	38%	12%	15%

Dispensing Duration:

- 6% of respondents who dispense Schedule IV medications do so for 1-3 days.
- 12% of respondents who dispense Schedule IV medications do so for 4-7 days.
- 60% of respondents who dispense Schedule IV medications do so for 8 or more days.
- 22% of respondents do not dispense Schedule IV medications.

Butorphenol is a commonly used medication in veterinary medicine for the relief of mild to moderate pain in companion animals, exotics, zoo animals, horses, birds and other wildlife. Also used as an injection in cattle to provide analgesia, sedation and restraint for safe handling. Federal regulations require a 3 day milk withdrawal and a 5 day meat withdrawal. Tramadol is a narcotic-like, oral medication used to relieve mild, chronic pain in dogs, cats, horses, birds and exotics. It may also be used for epidural analgesia in standing surgery in cattle. All use of Tramadol is “extra-label,” meaning that the medication is approved for use in humans only, with no specific directives on the label for non- human use or dosing. The practice of extra-label use is common and legal in the practice of veterinary medicine under US Federal Law.

Phenobarbital A barbiturate, and the most common antiseizure medication utilized. Available for in hospital administration and predominantly a chronic use medication for continued antiseizure controlled. Plumb DC. Phenobarbital.

Plumb's Veterinary Drugs. Monograph updated December 2023. Accessed January 26, 2024

Schedule IV benzodiazepines are used to treat anxiety, the tremors associated with toxicity/poisoning, but most commonly for pre-operative sedation and intubation in conjunction with Ketamine or another dissociative. Diazepam, or Valium, and Alprazolam are by far the mostly commonly used by our respondents. Diazepam is available as a tablet and as an injectable, which likely accounts for ease and frequency of use. On the other hand, some of the other human benzodiazepines, such as Lorazepam, Clonazepam and Temazepam are only used by 0-5% of our respondents, and are prescribed, not dispensed.