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Advanced Practice Registered Nurses Pledge Efforts to Reduce Prescription Drug Abuse in the Commonwealth

The KY Coalition of Nurse Practitioners and Nurse Midwives (KCNPNM), 2,049 members strong, applaud the actions announced on Thursday by Governor Beshear, Speaker Stumbo and Attorney General Conway to address the scourge of prescription drug abuse which plagues Kentucky. Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) represented by the coalition share the concerns expressed by policy-makers, law enforcement officials and communities across the Commonwealth about the growing problem of prescription drug abuse.

APRNs were given the statutory authority by the 2006 KY General Assembly session to prescribe Schedule II – V controlled substances within the limitations laid out in KRS 314.042. The Nurse Practitioners and Certified Nurse Midwives who have chosen to exercise this authority have met the requirements in statute, including obtaining a DEA number in order to prescribe.

Coalition President Julianne Ewen notes: “Through our pharmacy continuing education requirements – more than is required for physicians – we strive to keep abreast of the latest developments in pharmaceuticals and of the problems being encountered in the diversion of drugs. Our goal is to always prescribe for our patients in the safest, most efficient and effective manner possible.”

Past President Wendy Fletcher points out that the latest KASPER data available shows that while APRNs make up 9.9% of all prescribers in Kentucky, they prescribe only 3.7% of all of the controlled substances being prescribed in the Commonwealth. “KCNPNM is proud that APRNs have demonstrated that they are responsible prescribers of controlled substances. We work closely with the Kentucky Board of Nursing in encouraging safe prescribing practices by all APRNs.”

As a group, notes Legislative Chair Beth Partin, APRNs who prescribe controlled substances have eagerly made use of the KASPER tracking system, recognizing it as an effective means of controlling drug-seeking behavior and the illegal and harmful diversion of controlled substances. On September 10, 2011, the coalition’s Board of Directors unanimously passed a motion to add a requirement that all APRNs who have a DEA number register for a KASPER account. This language has been incorporated in developing legislation which will be filed for consideration in the 2012 KY General Assembly session.

The coalition has expressed its commitment to working with all agencies and groups who are addressing the prescription drug problem and its interest in being represented on the new KASPER advisory board. Julianne Ewen noted “We believe that the addition of APRNs who are prescribing controlled substances for different populations will be very helpful to KASPER officials and law enforcement professionals in creating guidelines for generally accepted practices.”

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