

Prescription drug abuse a constant battle in Tenn.

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The battle against prescription drug abuse in Tennessee is constantly being fought by officers and lawmakers.

The Commercial Appeal (<http://bit.ly/13QUvEr>) reports 79 of the 92 drug-related deaths in Shelby County in 2010 can be attributed to prescription medications such as methadone and oxycodone.

Sheriff's Chief Insp. Wayne Goudy says when the 2012 numbers are compiled officials expected to see a 15 percent increase in overdose deaths.

"The pain medication business has just exploded," says Goudy, noting that non-legitimate consumers include dealers as well as addicts. "Lortab is the No. 1 abused prescription drug in Shelby County. I can get a prescription that costs 37 cents a pill, but then I can sell it on the street for about \$8 a pill."

Officials are trying to battle the numbers on different fronts.

On April 1, Tennessee began requiring pain clinics to use a database to track commonly abused drugs. In addition, lawmakers have passed stricter regulations for pain clinics that the governor is expected to sign.

The measures are in addition to a registry of pain clinic locations created last year.

"These are starting points, having them register and tell us who they are," says Tommy Farmer, director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Methamphetamine and Pharmaceutical Task Force. "If they're providing quality care and doing the right thing, they're not going to have any issues."

He said the new restrictions on pain clinics are needed.

"There are some good drugs out there and they need to be available for people who need them, but we've got to do something even if it may be that some folks are inconvenienced," says Farmer. "We're not going to arrest our way out of this problem. We're going to have to treat our medicine cabinets the same we would treat the safekeeping of a loaded gun."

Information from: The Commercial Appeal, <http://www.commercialappeal.com>