

The truth about Oregon's meth problem since returning pseudoephedrine (PSE) to a prescription drug

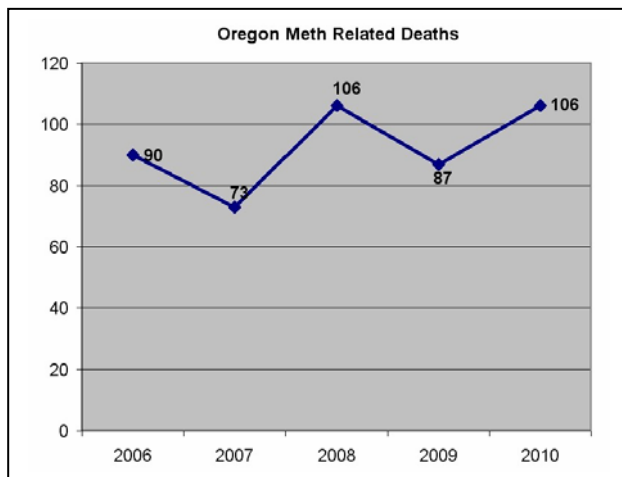
December 30, 2011

Here they go again, with more misleading information. Recently, a number of current and former elected officials in a number of states, who are opposed to returning PSE to a prescription drug, have stated that Oregon's meth problem has gotten worse since Oregon returned PSE to a prescription drug in 2006. In support of their assertion, they cite media reports of increased Oregon meth related deaths. This is misleading in a number of ways, and has been spoon fed to these officials by the industry. So let's set the record straight.

First, returning PSE to a prescription drug is about getting rid of PSE smurfing and domestic meth labs. It is not about getting rid of meth. Big difference. Most meth isn't made in domestic meth labs. I could stop here, and simply say what the industry and these officials are referring to is an attempt to mislead and distract from the issue of PSE smurfing feeding domestic meth labs. However, let's continue.

Oregon meth related deaths

The Oregon State Medical Examiner tracks and annually publishes drug related death statistics. Each drug related death is a tragedy, and I don't want to make light of that. However, drug related death



statistics are fairly small numbers that fluctuate from year to year. Furthermore, they are not necessarily a direct indicator of current drug usage. For example, a friend of mine who passed away a few years ago at a relatively young age of heart failure died as a direct result of his historic meth usage (among many other bad side effects, meth is cardiotoxic). However, my friend had been clean for a number of years, and was working for a program helping others get clean.

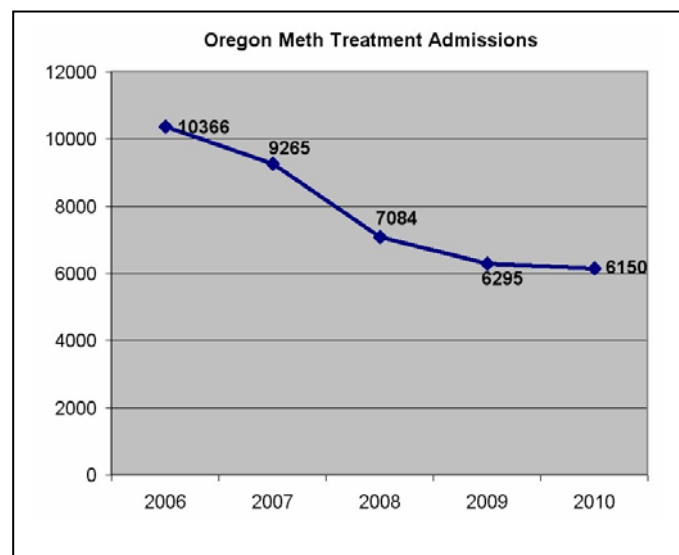
On the left is a chart showing Oregon meth related death statistics since 2006, the year PSE was returned to a prescription drug in Oregon (again, keep in mind that returning PSE to a prescription drug is about getting rid of PSE smurfing and domestic meth labs, not meth).

Oregon Meth Treatment Admissions

So let's talk about larger data sets that actually can be good indicators of current meth usage in Oregon, and not misleading like the industry and their supporters would have you believe. In other words, let's tell the rest of the story that the industry does not want you to hear.

The Oregon Department of Human Services tracks substance abuse treatment admissions by primary substance of abuse. These statistics cover all types of treatment programs, both government and private, and all means of entry into treatment, both court ordered or voluntary.

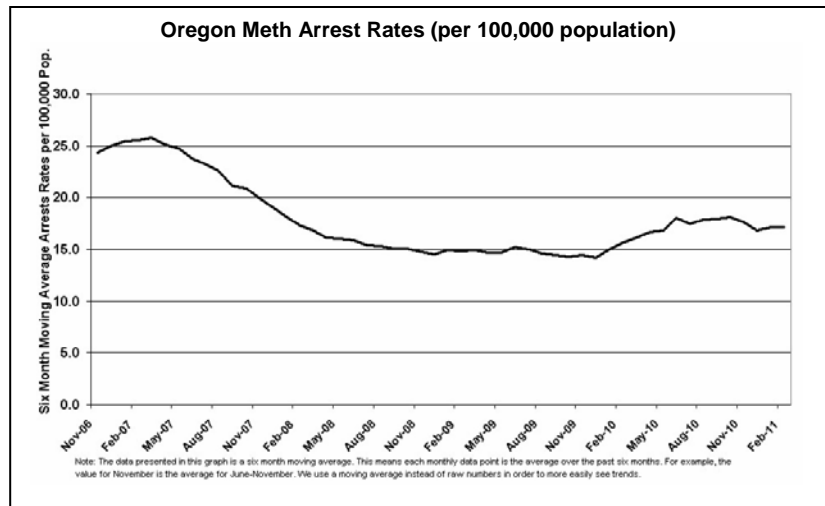
The chart on the right shows Oregon meth treatment admissions for the same period of time referenced above (2006 through 2010).



Oregon Meth Arrests

Let's look at another large data set: Meth arrests. The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission tracks drug arrests by drug type for the primary drugs of abuse, including meth. This includes all categories, such as drug possession, distribution, and manufacture. However, it is worth noting that drug possession arrests make up the overwhelming bulk of overall drug arrests.

The chart on the right shows Oregon meth arrests for roughly the same period of time referenced above (2006 through 2010).



The Truth

The truth the industry does not want you to hear is that Oregon has experienced:

- A 100% reduction (elimination) of PSE smurfing;
- A 96% reduction in meth lab incidents;
- A 32% reduction in meth arrests;
- A 33% reduction in meth treatment admissions; and
- A 35% reduction in meth-related emergency room visits.

<http://www.oregondec.org/OregonFactSheet.pdf>

By the way, PolitiFact has checked these assertions, and given me a rather rare "True" rating:

<http://www.politifact.com/oregon/statements/2011/apr/02/rob-bovett/oregon-district-attorney-says-meth-lab-seizures-an/>

It is also worth noting that an estimated 78% of property crimes in Oregon are committed by addicts stealing to pay for their addiction. This should come as no surprise. In 2008, Oregon experienced the largest decrease in crime rates in our nation. By 2009, Oregon crime rates were at a 50-year low.

By any realistic measure, Oregon's meth problem is not worse than it was five years ago. I would appreciate elected officials from other states taking the time to do the research before repeating things about the Oregon experience that are misleading, at best.

That being said, I'll say it yet again: Returning PSE to a prescription drug is not about getting rid of meth. It is about getting rid of PSE smurfing and domestic meth labs.

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For further reading:

- New York Times Op Ed: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/opinion/16bovett.html>
- Response to latest industry PowerPoint: <http://www.oregondec.org/ResponseToIndustryPowerPoint.pdf>
- Response to latest industry Talking Points: <http://www.oregondec.org/ResponseToIndustryTalkingPoints.pdf>
- General web site on this issue: <http://www.oregondec.org/pse.htm>

"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." – Daniel Patrick Moynihan