Doctors still overprescribing opioids, despite new limits

BY VIRGINIA BRIDGES

RALEIGH

Thousands of North Carolina doctors appear to be breaking a new state law that limits opioid prescriptions. The data from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services shows that the addictive drugs for the first time in 20 years have been prescribed to more than one in five patients, nearly twice the percentage in 2011.

The data from the state health department shows that during fiscal year 2017, doctors wrote prescriptions for 8.8 million opioid doses, an increase of 18.7 percent from the year before. The numbers for 2016 were not available.

The data comes from the state’s controlled-substance reporting system, a database of prescriptions doctors and pharmacists fill to help prevent drug abuse. The challenge for the DHHS and the board is that the database does not contain the medical details necessary to filter out irrelevant cases and determine if the prescriptions violate the STOP Act.

The law was passed in 2016 with broad support from both political parties. It was the first time DHHS presented a report of the state’s controlled-substances organization to find alternative ways to enforce the law.

The law requires doctors to determine whether those prescriptions are likely legitimate or may have been targeting the patient.

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**TEEN**

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**LOCAL**

**FROM PAGE 1A**

"Personally, I don’t have a concern that law enforcement is mistakenly targeting him," Echols said.

"Echols, however, said he would pursue that legal approach in the hopes the case against Samuel, beyond the arresting officer’s admission of probable cause for the reasonable suspicion that a crime may have been committed.

"Probably cause doesn’t give us a conviction,” Echols said.

**QUESTIONED IN ROBBERY**

Samuel, 19, was charged with robbery, assault with a deadly weapon inflicting serious injury, and four counts of robbery with a dangerous weapon in the Jan. 12, 2017, killing of Felipe Alexman Perez, 42, on South Robbins Street.

Sharp says her client was driving, leaving Surles’ gas station next to Surles' Super 7 convenience store.

Samuel, police charged Holeman and Samuel with possession of a firearm by a felon.

A Sheriff’s Office detective was told police found a gun in the glove compartment of Lowery’s Honda Pilot he was driving, leaving Surles’ house at 9:52 p.m. when police pulled over Samuel’s SUV four days later on March 7, they found Holeman’s cell phone in the car.

In an interview, Samuel said he, Holeman and Taijay Devon Surles had been driving, leaving Surles’ house.

The Police Department denied in comment for this story or say whether Samuel is a suspect in the fatal robbery.

**QUESTIONED IN BREAKING AND ENTERING**

Here is what Samuel, his lawyer and court records say about the breaking and entering case and related March 7 arrest.

On March 7, Samuel said he had met with his attorney and waited at a convenience store.

The man grabbed the man and struggled with Samuel, putting him in a choke hold until he passed out. Police found Holeman dead on the ground and a gun lying near him at 9:52 p.m.

When police pulled over Samuel’s SUV four days later on March 7, they found Holeman’s cell phone in the car.

"I got no choice but to get in his car," Samuel said. "He was already inside, and he said he didn’t know anything about it.

"I don’t get to the next day," said Samuel, who works at McAlister’s Deli.

In the warrant, investigators D.L. Cramer states surveillance footage from a gas station next to ‘Surles’ house shows a dark SUV, license plate SCW–3668, sitting in the parking lot and returning around 10:30 p.m., and Samuel left about 10 minutes later, he said.

"I don’t know why Lowery jumped in his car."

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In an interview, Samuel said he, Holeman and Taijay Devon Surles had been driving, leaving Surles’ house. Holeman walked off around 9:30 p.m., and Samuel said he was left about 10 minutes later, he said.

"I don’t want to be involved in the robbery and that Holeman had charged his phone in Samuel’s car and walked off without it.

On March 21, a couple of weeks after questioning Samuel, police charged

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