



## **Crackdown on prescription drug abuse hurts pain management patients**

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March 24, 2016

State and federal crackdowns on prescription drug abuse have led to unintended consequences for chronic pain patients who rely on narcotics to function, patients and doctors tell 8 On Your Side.

Patti DeSalvo called 8 On Your Side when her Walgreens pharmacist recently cut her off, refusing to fill any prescriptions for Oxycontin and Morphine – at any Walgreens location. Without the medication, DeSalvo says she can barely get out of bed.

“Pain like you would not believe,” she said. “I mean, my whole body aches.”

It’s all because of a car accident, followed by damaged discs in DeSalvo’s back, severe arthritis and now lupus. She’s taken pain pills for nearly five years and says Walgreens wouldn’t give her an explanation as to why they no longer wanted her as a customer.

Walgreens sent this statement to 8 On Your Side:

“We have looked into this matter. The pharmacists consulted with the patient’s prescriber and, using their professional judgment, acted in the patient’s best interest.”

It’s not just Walgreens turning away patients including DeSalvo. She says other pharmacists tell her they don’t have the medication in stock or they require pain medication customers to have at least six prescriptions.

“I don’t know where I’m going to get my medication next month, but yet your drug dealers know where they’re getting theirs,” DeSalvo said.

8 On Your Side has heard this before. After state and federal crackdowns on pain pill abuse, some can’t get the medication they need.

Dr. Jeffrey Singer, a surgeon and Cato Institute scholar, says the government has gone too far. While he does not want to see drug abuse, legitimate patients now suffer from this unintended consequence, Singer said. He also worries that long-time pain patients who are dependent on the

medication will turn to alternatives from the street, such as buying pills from drug dealers or even turning to heroin.

“It casts a chilling effect and makes them feel like, ‘I’d better cut back on writing these prescriptions because I don’t want to get into trouble,’” Singer said.

Once the script is written, a pharmacist makes the final decision. And government regulators are watching.

“The pharmacist is feeling the same pressure that the physician is feeling,” Singer says.