U.S. Retail Distribution of Buprenorphine Approaches 1.5 Million Grams

After buprenorphine was approved to treat opioid dependence in 2002 (see CESAR FAX, Volume 20, Issue 22), the DEA’s Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System (ARCOS) began tracking the retail distribution of this synthetic opioid. ARCOS monitors “controlled substance activity from the point of manufacture and/or distribution to the point of sale to the retail level registrant (e.g., pharmacies, hospitals, practitioners, teaching institutions, researchers, analytical labs, importers/exporters, and narcotic treatment programs)” (Leonhart, p. 3). The number of grams of buprenorphine distributed to these retail outlets has increased from 13,475 in 2003 to 1,451,503 in 2010. Previous research has found that increases in sales of other opioid analgesics are correlated with increases in unintentional overdose deaths involving these drugs (see CESAR FAX, Volume 20, Issue 21).

Number of Grams of Buprenorphine Distributed to Retail Outlets, 2003-2010

NOTES: ARCOS does not capture transaction information from these retail outlets to end users. ARCOS tracks all Schedule I and II materials (manufacturers and distributors); Schedule III narcotic and gamma-hydroxybutyric acid (GHB) materials (manufacturers and distributors); and selected Schedule III and IV psychotropic drugs (manufacturers only).