

Research Article

Procedures for Investigating Professional Misconduct by Medical or Pharmaceutical Professionals in the Field of Drug Control

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Received: 05 January 2026; Manuscript No: JDAR-26-188474; **Editor assigned:** 07 January 2026; PreQC No: JDAR-26-188474 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 21 January 2026; QC No: JDAR-26-188474; **Revised:** 05 February 2026; Manuscript No: JDAR-26-188474 (R); **Published:** 12 February 2026; DOI: 10.4303/JDAR/236496

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Abstract

Aim: The article examines the peculiarities of the methodology for investigating criminal offenses related to the improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers in the field of trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and precursors.

Methods: The methodological basis of the study of the methodology for investigating improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers in the field of countering drugs is a set of general scientific and special legal methods of cognition, the application of which provides a comprehensive and objective study of the relevant legal and forensic phenomena.

The basic method in the study is the dialectical method, which allows us to consider the processes of drug trafficking and their legal regulation in development, interconnection and interdependence with other social phenomena. Its use made it possible to identify contradictions between regulatory requirements and the practice of their implementation, as well as to establish trends in the transformation of offenses in this area.

Results: The methodology for investigating such offenses involves a phased organization of the investigator's activities. At the initial stage, information is entered into the unified register of pre-trial investigations, the scene of the incident is inspected, documentation is seized, applicants and responsible persons are questioned, and primary examinations are ordered. At the main stage, a detailed analysis of accounting documentation is carried out, an inventory of narcotics is taken, medical personnel are questioned, and if necessary, covert investigative (search) actions are carried out and access is gained to electronic accounting systems. The final stage involves summarizing the collected evidence, conducting additional expert studies, notifying the person of suspicion, and sending the indictment to the court.

Conclusion: The methodology for investigating misconduct by medical and pharmaceutical professionals in the field of drug trafficking is complex and requires a combination of forensic, medical, and pharmaceutical knowledge. The effectiveness of the investigation depends on the timely collection of evidence, proper interaction between agencies, and the use of modern digital tools.

Keywords: Drugs; Medical professionals; Pharmaceutical professionals; Forensics; Pre-trial investigation; Official negligence; Evidence

Introduction

The current stage of development of Ukrainian society is characterized by significant transformations in the field of healthcare, digitalization of medical services and strengthening of state control over the circulation of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors. Over the past five years, these processes have taken place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as active integration into the European legal space. Taken together, these factors have significantly influenced both the organization of medical and pharmaceutical activities and the nature of offenses in the field of narcotic drug trafficking.

The problem of improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers is becoming particularly relevant, which in some cases becomes one of the factors of the leakage of narcotic drugs into illegal circulation. Changes in the logistics of drug supply, disruptions in the functioning of medical institutions, staff shortages and increased workload on staff during periods of crisis have created additional risks of violating the established rules for the circulation of narcotic drugs. At the same time, expanding access to potent drugs, in particular for palliative care, as well as simplifying certain procedures for their prescription, although they have a positive social significance, at the same time require an increased level of control [1].

An important factor determining the current issues is the implementation of an electronic health system (e-Health)

and electronic prescriptions for narcotic drugs. On the one hand, this contributes to increasing the transparency of drug circulation and reducing abuse, but on the other hand, it creates new challenges associated with the possibility of unauthorized access to systems, manipulation of electronic data, as well as an insufficient level of technical and digital competence of individual employees. In the practice of law enforcement agencies, cases of using electronic tools to conceal violations or legalize the illegal distribution of narcotic drugs have been recorded [2].

An equally important trend in recent years is the transformation of the methods of committing offenses in this area. If previously traditional forms of violations related to falsification of paper documentation or non-compliance with storage rules dominated, now there is an increase in the share of violations that combine both classic and digital elements. In particular, these include forging electronic prescriptions, using someone else's accounts in medical systems, manipulating electronic accounting journals and other forms of cyber abuse in the medical field [3].

A separate problem is the difficulty of identifying and proving the facts of improper performance of professional duties in the field of drug trafficking. This is due to both the high level of latency of such violations and the specifics of the professional activities of medical and pharmaceutical workers, which involves significant autonomy in decision-making. In addition, difficulties arise when distinguishing between criminally punishable acts and disciplinary violations, as well as when establishing a causal relationship between the actions of an employee and negative consequences, which are often delayed or indirect in nature.

The relevance of the study is also due to the need to adapt the national system for combating illicit drug trafficking to international standards, in particular the recommendations of the UN, WHO and the European Union. In this context, the improvement of forensic investigation methods is of particular importance, which should take into account both traditional and new methods of committing offenses, including the use of digital technologies [4].

Despite the presence of a significant number of scientific works devoted to general issues of investigating crimes in the field of drug trafficking, the issue of improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers remains insufficiently developed, especially in the forensic aspect. Further research is needed on the issues of forming typical investigative situations, improving the investigator's algorithms, using specialized knowledge and digital evidence [5].

In view of the above, the purpose of the article is to develop and scientifically substantiate a methodology for investigating improper performance of professional duties by medical or pharmaceutical workers in the field of countering drugs, taking into account modern challenges and trends in the development of this area. Achieving this goal involves solving a number of tasks, in particular, analyzing

the regulatory framework, determining the forensic characteristics of offenses, studying typical investigative situations, and developing practical recommendations for pre-trial investigation bodies [6].

Materials and Methods

Among the general scientific methods, an important place is occupied by the system-structural method, which was used to study the mechanism of committing offenses and to build a forensic characteristic of improper performance of professional duties. Thanks to this method, the elements of the structure of such offenses were determined, in particular, the object, subject, method of commission and typical traces, and their interrelationships were established.

The formal-logical method was used to analyze the norms of criminal and medical legislation that regulate the circulation of narcotic drugs and establish liability for violation of professional duties. Its application made it possible to clarify the content of legal categories, to interpret them and to formulate scientifically substantiated conclusions regarding the qualification of the relevant acts.

The comparative legal method made it possible to study foreign experience in regulating the circulation of narcotic drugs and the practice of investigating similar offenses, as well as to identify the possibilities of implementing individual elements of foreign models into the national legal system. This contributed to the formation of proposals for improving domestic legislation and the practice of its application.

Sociological methods, in particular, the analysis of the practice of law enforcement agencies, the generalization of materials of criminal proceedings and expert assessments, were used to identify typical investigative situations, problems of proof and shortcomings in the activities of the subjects of investigation. This allowed to ensure the applied nature of the study and bring its results closer to the needs of law enforcement practice.

The statistical method was used to process data on the number of offenses in the field of drug trafficking, their structure and dynamics, which made it possible to determine the most common ways of committing offenses and outline the trends in their development.

The use of special forensic methods is of particular importance, in particular the method of forensic analysis, modeling of investigative situations and forecasting. Thanks to these methods, typical algorithms of the investigator's actions at different stages of the pre-trial investigation were formed, the optimal directions of collecting evidentiary information and methods of its verification were determined [7].

In addition, the study used an interdisciplinary approach that involves the use of knowledge in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, toxicology and healthcare organization. This is due to the specifics of the research object, which is at the intersection of criminal law, administrative regulation and medical practice.

Thus, the use of these methods in their entirety ensured the comprehensiveness, systematicity and scientific validity of the study, and also allowed to formulate practically significant recommendations for improving the methodology for investigating improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers in the field of countering drugs.

Results and Discussion

The methodology for investigating improper performance of professional duties by medical or pharmaceutical workers in the field of countering drugs is of a phased nature and involves a logically consistent organization of the investigator's activities, covering the initial, main and final stages of the pre-trial investigation [8]. Each of these stages is characterized by specific tasks, typical investigative situations, a range of procedural actions and features of the use of special knowledge [9].

The initial stage of the investigation begins from the moment information is entered into the unified register of pre-trial investigations and is of decisive importance for the formation of the evidence base [10]. At this stage, the primary task is to record traces of the offense, prevent their loss or destruction, as well as establish the main circumstances of the incident [11]. Typical investigative situations at this stage include the detection of a shortage of narcotic drugs in a medical or pharmaceutical institution, receipt of applications or messages from patients or their relatives, the results of inspections by regulatory authorities, as well as information obtained within the framework of operational-search activities [12,13].

As part of the initial stage, the investigator is obliged to immediately conduct an inspection of the scene, which in this category of cases has specifics related to the need to study medical and pharmaceutical documentation, storage conditions of narcotic drugs, the availability of technical means of accounting and control [14,15]. It is important to ensure the preservation of accounting journals, prescriptions, write-off acts, invoices, as well as access to electronic systems (in particular e-Health), which may contain information about the movement of drugs. It is advisable to immediately seize the relevant documentation or impose an arrest on it to prevent its falsification or destruction [16].

At the same time, interrogations are conducted of applicants, employees of a medical or pharmacy institution, persons responsible for accounting and storage of narcotic drugs [17]. Special attention should be paid to establishing the circle of persons who had access to drugs or electronic systems, as well as to clarifying the actual procedure for the circulation of drugs in a particular institution [18]. At this stage, it is also advisable to order primary examinations, in particular forensic-pharmaceutical or documentary examinations, as well as conducting an inventory of narcotic drugs with the involvement of relevant specialists [19].

The main stage of the investigation is aimed at a

comprehensive, complete and objective study of the circumstances of the criminal offense, the identification of the guilty parties, the form of guilt and the motives of their actions [20]. At this stage, a systematic analysis of the collected information and its verification by conducting a complex of investigative (detective) and procedural actions is carried out [21].

A detailed analysis of medical and pharmaceutical documentation is of key importance, including drug registration logs, medical histories, prescriptions, electronic records, discharge certificates and other documents [22]. It is important to compare the actual drug residues with accounting data, which allows identifying discrepancies and establishing the period and mechanism of their occurrence [23]. In the case of using electronic systems, special attention should be paid to the study of access logs, data change history, as well as the identification of users who carried out the relevant operations [24].

At this stage, the capabilities of expert research are actively used. Forensic medical examinations are assigned to establish the consequences of the actions of a medical professional for the patient, forensic pharmaceutical examinations to assess the correctness of the circulation of drugs, as well as handwriting and technical examinations of documents in cases of suspicion of their forgery. In the case of using electronic systems, it is advisable to conduct computer-technical examinations [25].

Interrogations at the main stage are of a clarifying and incriminating nature. Repeated interrogations of witnesses, face-to-face confrontations between participants in the events, as well as interrogations of suspects are conducted. It is important to establish a causal relationship between the actions or inaction of the employee and the consequences that occurred, as well as to clarify the conditions that contributed to the commission of the offense [26]. If necessary, covert investigative (search) actions can be carried out, in particular audio and video surveillance, removal of information from electronic systems, which allows obtaining additional evidence [27].

The final stage of the investigation is associated with summing up the collected evidence base and making procedural decisions. At this stage, the investigator evaluates all the collected evidence in terms of its sufficiency, admissibility and interrelationship. If necessary, additional investigative actions are carried out or additional or repeated examinations are ordered to eliminate contradictions or gaps in the evidence base [28].

An important task is the final formulation of suspicion, determination of the legal qualification of the act, as well as the establishment of all circumstances subject to proof in accordance with criminal procedural legislation. Particular attention is paid to proving the causal relationship, the form of guilt and the degree of responsibility of a specific person.

After the pre-trial investigation is completed, the investigator draws up an indictment, in which he systematizes all the established circumstances, provides evidence and justifies

the legal qualification of the act [29]. The materials of the criminal proceedings are transferred to the court. At the same time, at this stage it is advisable to submit proposals to eliminate the causes and conditions that contributed to the commission of the offense, in particular, to improve the system of accounting and control over the circulation of narcotic drugs in medical and pharmaceutical institutions [30].

Thus, the phased organization of the investigation ensures its systematicity and efficiency, allows for timely detection, recording and investigation of evidence, as well as minimizing the risks of information loss. The comprehensive application of forensic methods, procedural tools and special knowledge is a key condition for the successful investigation of offenses related to the improper performance of professional duties in the field of narcotic drug circulation (Table 1) [31].

Table 1: Methodology for investigating misconduct by a medical or pharmaceutical professional in the field of counter-narcotics

Investigation stage	Main tasks	Investigative (procedural) actions	Sources of evidence	Typical risks
Initial stage	Recording the event, preserving traces, identifying the circle of people	Scene inspection; seizure of documentation; interrogation of applicants and personnel; inventory; temporary access to items and documents; seizure of evidence	Accounting journals; prescriptions; discharge certificates; invoices; electronic records (eHealth); video recordings	Destruction or falsification of documents; staff collusion; loss of electronic data; untimely response
Main stage	Establishing the circumstances, method of commission, guilty persons	Documentation analysis; interrogation of witnesses and suspects; face-to-face meetings; examinations (forensic, pharmaceutical, handwriting, computer-technical); NSRD; access to electronic systems	Expert opinions; testimony; electronic logs; medical histories; prescriptions; audit results	Difficulty in proving causality; lack of specialized knowledge; technical limitations of access to systems; data manipulation
Final stage	Summary of evidence, legal qualification, sending the case to court	Evidence assessment; additional examinations; notification of suspicion; drawing up an indictment; procedural registration of materials	The totality of all evidence; expert opinions; summarized materials of the proceedings	Insufficient evidence; contradictions in conclusions; qualification errors; procedural violations

The presented investigation methodology has a clearly structured, phased nature, which corresponds to the general principles of the criminal process and at the same time takes into account the specifics of offenses in the field of drug trafficking. Its peculiarity lies in the high level of dependence on documentary and electronic evidence, as well as the need to involve special knowledge in the field of medicine and pharmacy [32].

The initial stage is critically important, since it is at this stage that the primary evidentiary base is formed. The effectiveness of this stage directly affects the possibility of further proving guilt [33]. Practice shows that the main problems are the untimely removal of documentation and insufficient control over electronic data, which creates conditions for their change or destruction. In this regard, the efficiency of the investigator's actions and the use of measures to ensure criminal proceedings are of particular importance [34].

The main stage is characterized by the greatest intensity of evidentiary activity. Its specificity lies in the need for in-depth analysis of a large array of specialized information, which requires appropriate training of the investigator or active involvement of experts. An important aspect is the study of electronic accounting systems, which reflects modern trends in the digitalization of medicine. At the same time, it is at this stage that difficulties arise in proving a causal relationship, especially in cases where the

consequences are indirect or manifest themselves after a certain time [35].

The final stage performs the function of systematization and legal assessment of the collected materials. Its quality determines the prospects of the trial. The main risks are the presence of gaps in the evidence base or contradictions between individual pieces of evidence, which can be used by the defense. Therefore, it is important to promptly eliminate such shortcomings by conducting additional investigative actions and examinations [36].

In general, the methodology for investigating this category of offenses is characterized by an interdisciplinary nature, high dependence on the proper organization of drug accounting and the level of digitalization of healthcare systems. Its effectiveness largely depends on the interaction of investigators with regulatory authorities, expert institutions and the administration of medical and pharmaceutical institutions. A promising direction for improvement is the expansion of the use of digital evidence, automated data analysis systems and the unification of procedures for documenting the circulation of narcotic drugs.

Conclusion

As a result of the study, it was established that improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical workers in the field of drug trafficking is

a complex multifactorial phenomenon that combines signs of professional negligence, violation of special rules for the circulation of controlled substances and, in certain cases, official offenses. Such actions constitute an increased public danger, as they create the prerequisites for the leakage of drugs into illegal circulation, which negatively affects the state of public health and safety.

It is substantiated that the effectiveness of the investigation of this category of offenses largely depends on a properly formed forensic methodology, which should take into account the specifics of medical and pharmaceutical activities, the high level of latency of such offenses, as well as their close connection with documentary and electronic sources of evidentiary information. It was determined that the key element of the methodology is the phased organization of the investigation, which includes the initial, main and final stages, each of which has its own tasks, tools and risks.

It has been proven that at the initial stage, the efficiency of the investigator's actions is crucial, aimed at fixing traces of the offense and ensuring the preservation of documentary and electronic evidence. At the main stage, analytical and evidentiary activities related to the study of accounting documentation, conducting examinations and establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between the employee's actions and consequences dominate. The final stage involves the systematization of evidence, its legal assessment and the adoption of procedural decisions that determine the prospects for the trial.

It has been established that a feature of proving in such criminal proceedings is the need for the comprehensive use of various types of evidence, among which documents, electronic data and expert opinions play a leading role. At the same time, proving a cause-and-effect relationship remains one of the most complex elements, which necessitates the wide involvement of specialized knowledge in the fields of medicine, pharmacy and information technology.

A number of problematic aspects were identified that complicate the investigation process, in particular, the difficulty of distinguishing between criminal, administrative and disciplinary liability, the possibility of falsifying medical documentation, limited access to information that constitutes a medical secret, as well as an insufficient level of digital integration of information systems. Particular attention is drawn to the transformation of the methods of committing offenses in connection with the digitalization of the healthcare sector, which leads to the emergence of new forms of abuse of electronic systems.

Taking into account modern challenges, the need to improve the investigation methodology by implementing a comprehensive approach that involves the integration of forensic, medical and digital tools was substantiated. The development of electronic accounting of narcotic drugs, strengthening control over prescription dispensing, increasing the level of specialization of investigators and developing unified methodological recommendations for the investigation of this category of offenses were identified as promising areas.

Thus, improving the methodology for investigating improper performance of professional duties by medical and pharmaceutical professionals in the field of countering drugs is a necessary condition for increasing the efficiency of criminal justice, ensuring legality in the field of drug trafficking, and strengthening the healthcare system as a whole.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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