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New York–Presbyterian turns to data analytics to fight opioid misuse

New York–Presbyterian said Wednesday it plans to work with data analytics company Splunk to track opioids and other controlled substances within the health system.

It had been using Splunk on IT security and approached the San Francisco–based company last year when it was looking for a way to prevent diversion of drugs to the black market, said Jennings Aske, New York–Presbyterian's chief information security officer.

Aske said he thought Splunk might be able to help analyze the data produced by the system's electronic health records, software for prescribing controlled substances and electronic medicine cabinets.

Splunk will help New York–Presbyterian compile profiles on their physicians' prescribing habits, providing alerts about suspicious activity such as when a provider's ID is used to access a drug cabinet when the person is on vacation, Aske said.

The health system plans to start using the service in the second quarter.

"Splunk has the ability to rapidly condense information and identify outliers," Aske said.

Nearly 1,500 New York City residents died from drug overdoses in 2017, with 82% of those cases tied to opioids.

"Any hospital that says there isn't diversion happening is kidding itself," Aske said. "This is a national crisis."

New York–Presbyterian is exploring ways to use Splunk to keep track of expensive cancer medications and could use it to track whether doctors are prescribing antibiotics inappropriately.

For now, the service is free for New York–Presbyterian, which is paying Splunk for help with cybersecurity.

Splunk hasn't decided on pricing for future clients, said Shirley Golen, the company's director of health care strategy. She said the drug security product's advantage will be in how it can analyze information from multiple electronic health record and e-prescribing vendors.

"All of those various data sources are critical and have to be brought together to understand where there could be misuse of controlled substances," Golen said.