



# Addiction Messenger

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*Ideas for Treatment Improvement*

## Prescription Medication Abuse

### Part 1 - Facts on the Rx Abuse Epidemic

**W**hat is prescription drug abuse? It can be defined as a nonmedical use of a prescription drug at a higher-than-prescribed dose, taking a drug that was prescribed for another individual, poisoning of another person with a prescribed drug, or substance abuse involving pharmaceuticals used for the experience or feeling they cause.

Prescription medications classed as depressants, opioid analgesics, stimulants and dissociative anesthetics are highly beneficial treatments for a variety of health conditions. Most people who take prescription medications use them responsibly. But, when abused—that is, taken by someone other than the patient for whom the medication was prescribed, or taken in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed—prescription medications can produce serious adverse health effects and can lead to addiction.

The consequences of misusing prescription medications can include:

- Addiction,
- Overdose,
- Toxic reactions, and
- Drug interactions that can lead to life-threatening conditions such as respiratory distress, hypertension/hypotension, seizures and death.

Prescription medicines are often perceived by the public as safer than illegal drugs, even when misused. Many consider them not addictive. Prescription drugs are most often obtained from family or friends for free, through sharing or by “raiding” a medicine cabinet. Adolescents and the elderly are particularly affected. Among teens, abuse of prescriptions is so prevalent it is now “normalized”.

The US Drug Enforcement Agency’s website states that:

- Prescription drug abuse has been increasing since the 1990’s. As of 2006, nearly 7 million Americans were abusing prescription drugs (more than the number who were abusing cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, Ecstasy, and inhalants, combined). That 7 million was up from just 3.8 million in 2000, an 80 percent increase in just 6 years.
- Prescription pain relievers are the drug of choice, vs. marijuana or cocaine, for new drug users.
- Opioid painkillers now cause more drug overdose deaths than cocaine and heroin combined.

*“Nothing is more fatal to health than an overcare of it.”*

~ Benjamin Franklin  
(1706-1790) ~

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**Next Issue:**

**What You Should  
Know & Look  
For**

- Nearly 1 in 10 high school seniors admits to abusing powerful prescription painkillers. A shocking 40 percent of teens and an almost equal number of their parents think abusing prescription painkillers is safer than abusing “street” drugs.
- Misuse of painkillers represents three-fourths of the overall problem of prescription drug abuse; hydrocodone is the most commonly diverted and abused controlled pharmaceutical in the U.S.
- Twenty-five percent of drug-related emergency department visits are associated with abuse of prescription drugs.
- Methods of acquiring prescription drugs for abuse include “doctor-shopping,” traditional drug-dealing, theft from pharmacies or homes, illicitly acquiring prescription drugs via the Internet, and from friends or relatives.

### How Much Do You Know About Prescription Drug Abuse Problem?

Here is a quiz from the “**Connect to Fight Rx Abuse**” website (<http://www.fightrxabuse.org>), which was developed and is maintained by Addiction Technology Transfer Center National Office. The Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration supported the development of the Web site which includes valuable resources for addiction professionals.

#### Take a Quick True-False Quiz from Connect to Fight Rx Abuse

1. Most people abusing prescription drugs get them from friends or relatives for free.
2. Middle-aged adults have higher rates of prescription drug abuse than adolescents or the elderly.
3. More Americans reported prescription drug abuse than the combined total of those reporting abuse of cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, and heroin in 2005.
4. The public in general has a good grasp of the dangers of misusing prescription medicines.
5. Drug abusers often want an appointment toward end of office hours or call after regular hours.
6. Women have higher rates than men of misuse of pain relievers, stimulants and meth-amphetamines.
7. Practitioners cannot be reimbursed for screening, assessment or brief intervention services.
8. Few screening and assessment tools are available

to practitioners in managing the risk of prescribing pain medication.

9. The number of prescriptions for controlled substances increased by 150 percent from 1992 to 2002.

10. A drug abuser will often state that specific non-narcotic analgesics do not work or that he/she is allergic to them.

#### Answers:

1. True
2. False, research shows that adolescents and young adults tended to have the highest rates of nonmedical use of prescription drugs. Prescription abuse among the elderly is also on the rise.
3. True
4. False, prescription medicines are often perceived by the public as safer than illegal drugs, even when misused. Many consider them as not addictive.
5. True
6. True
7. False, brief interventions can be very effective and are reimbursable.
8. False, Passik, Kirsh, & Casper (in press) reviewed the literature on 25 currently available screening and assessment tools that physicians can use.
9. True
10. True

#### The Internet Connection

Legitimate online pharmacies operate like drugstores where drugs are dispensed with a valid prescription. But many on-line pharmacies, do not obey the laws. An estimated 200 million people in the U.S. use the Internet, and these users are disproportionately young. The fact that children, teens and college students are likelier to be online than adults makes access to these pharmacies and controlled prescription drugs even more troubling. Many Internet pharmacies offer controlled drugs by advertising that no prescription is needed. Others dispense them after a patient completes an online questionnaire that may or may not be reviewed by a physician or a “script doctor”.

The DEA reports that approximately 95 percent of prescriptions filled by Internet pharmacies in 2006 were for controlled substances. With a credit card and the click of a mouse, the Internet offers a convenient and private avenue for accessing controlled drugs. If you are working with a client that uses the Internet to obtain drugs you may be interested in reading “**You’ve Got Drugs!: Prescription Drug Pushers on the Internet**” for more detailed information at: <http://www.casacolumbia.org/pplsearch.aspx>.

## Abusable Prescription Drugs

### DEPRESSANTS

#### barbiturates

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Amytal, Nembutal, Seconal, Phenobarbital*; barbs, reds, red birds, phennies, tooies, yellows, yellow jackets  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II, III, IV/injected, swallowed

#### benzodiazepines

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Ativan, Halcion, Librium, Valium, Xanax*; candy, downers, sleeping pills, tranks  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 IV/swallowed

#### flunitrazepam

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Rohypnol*; forget-me pill, Mexican Valium, R2, Roche, roofies, roofinol, rope, rophies  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 IV/swallowed

#### Intoxication Effects/ Consequences

*reduced pain and anxiety; feeling of well-being; lowered inhibitions; slowed pulse and breathing; lowered blood pressure; poor concentration/confusion, fatigue; impaired coordination, memory, judgment; respiratory depression and arrest, addiction*  
*Also, for barbiturates—sedation, drowsiness/depression, unusual excitement, fever, irritability, poor judgment, slurred speech, dizzy*  
*for benzodiazepines—sedation, drowsiness/dizziness*  
*for flunitrazepam—visual and gastrointestinal disturbances, urinary retention, memory loss for the time under the drug's effects*

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### OPIOID ANALGESICS/ MORPHINE DERIVATIVES

#### codeine

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Empirin with Codeine, Fiorinal with Codeine, Robitussin A-C, Tylenol with Codeine; Captain Cody, Cody, schoolboy*; (with glutethimide) doors & fours, loads, pancakes and syrup  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II, III, IV/injected, swallowed

#### fantanyl

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Actiq, Duragesic, Sublimaze*; Apache, China girl, China white, dance fever, friend, goodfella, jackpot, murder 8, TNT, Tango and Cash  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II/injected, smoked, snorted

#### morphine

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Roxanol, Duramorph; M, Miss Emma, monkey, white stuff*  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II, III/injected, swallowed, smoked

#### opium

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*laudanum, paregoric*; big O, black stuff, block, gum, hop  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II, III, V/swallowed, smoked

\* other opioid pain relievers (oxycodone, meperidine, hydro-morphone, hydrocodone, propoxyphene) *Tylox, OxyContin, Percodan, Percocet; oxy 80s, oxycotton, oxycet, hillbilly heroin, percs Demerol, meperidine hydrochloride; demmies, pain killer Dilaudid; juice, dillies Vicodin, Lortab, Lorcet; Darvon, Darvocet*  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II, III, IV/swallowed, injected, suppositories, chewed, crushed, snorted

#### Intoxication Effects/ Consequences

*pain relief, euphoria, drowsiness/respiratory depression and arrest, nausea, confusion, constipation, sedation, unconsciousness, coma, tolerance, addiction*  
*Also, for codeine—less analgesia, sedation, and respiratory depression than morphine*

### STIMULANTS

#### amphetamines

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Biphetamine, Dexedrine*; bennies, black beauties, crosses, hearts, LA turnaround, speed, truck drivers, uppers  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II/injected, swallowed, smoked, snorted

#### cocaine

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Cocaine hydrochloride*; blow, bump, C, candy, Charlie, coke, crack, flake, rock, snow, toot  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II/injected, smoked, snorted

#### methamphetamine

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Desoxyn*; chalk, crank, crystal, fire, glass, go fast, ice, meth, speed  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II/injected, swallowed, smoked, snorted

#### methylphenidate

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Ritalin*; JIF, MPH, R-ball, Skippy, the smart drug, vitamin R  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 II/injected, swallowed, snorted

#### Intoxication Effects/ Consequences

*increased heart rate, blood pressure, metabolism; feelings of exhilaration, energy, increased mental alertness/rapid or irregular heart beat; reduced appetite, weight loss, heart failure*  
*Also, for amphetamines—rapid breathing; hallucinations/tremor, loss of coordination; irritability, anxiousness, restlessness, delirium, panic, paranoia, impulsive behavior, aggressiveness, tolerance, addiction.*  
*for cocaine—increased temperature/chest pain, respiratory failure, nausea, abdominal pain, strokes, seizures, headaches, malnutrition*  
*for methamphetamine—aggression, violence, psychotic behavior/memory loss, cardiac and neurological damage; impaired memory and learning, tolerance, addiction.*  
*for methylphenidate—increase or decrease in blood pressure, psychotic episodes/digestive problems, loss of appetite, weight loss*

### DISSOCIATIVE ANESTHETICS

#### ketamine

**Commercial/Street Names**  
*Ketalar SV*; cat Valium, K, Special K, vitamin K  
**DEA Schedule/Administered**  
 III/injected, snorted, smoked

#### Intoxication Effects/ Consequences

*increased heart rate and blood pressure, impaired motor function/memory loss; numbness; nausea/vomiting*

### SOURCES

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