

# Prescription drug abuse



**ASSIGN  
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**Introduction.**

When we think of drug addicts and abuse we normally think of people who take the common street drugs such as cocaine, crack, heroine, or other illegal drugs. However most people don't realize or take seriously the growing number of abusers of prescription drugs currently in our country. There is a common misconception that just because a doctor prescribes a certain drug that that is somehow safer and different than using the so-called street drugs. After all, you are being given a prescription to take the drug by your physician, and it is not illegal or a crime. However, we must realize that addiction isn't limited to just illicit drugs on the street, but often doctor prescribed medications as well.

Prescription drugs have improved and saved countless numbers of lives over the years as many new breakthroughs have been achieved in science and medicine in treating a variety of known diseases. “ However, using these drugs without the supervision of a physician or for purposes different from their intended use can lead to serious adverse consequences, including death from overdose and physical addiction. Because many prescription drugs are often opiate based, when abused, these drugs can be as addictive and dangerous as illegal drugs.” 1) (Pat Moore Foundation | Prescription Drug Abuse, 2009).

According to (M. D , Volkow, 2005), director at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2) “ an estimated 48 million people (ages 12 and older), have used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons, which represents approximately 20 percent of the U. S. population.”

Additionally, 3) “ in 2000, about 43 percent of hospital emergency admissions for drug overdoses (nearly 500, 000 people) happened because of misused prescription drugs, and in “ 2006 alone, 700, 000 emergency room visits were attributed to prescription drug overdoses.” 4) (Thibodeau, 2009).

This type of drug abuse is increasing at an alarming rate because of their widespread availability, including online pharmacies which have made it much easier for anyone regardless of age to acquire drugs without a prescription. (Prescription Drug Abuse Information | Drug Rehab Programs, 2009). 3)

“ One of the most common and primary methods of obtaining prescription drugs by addicts is by doctor shopping according to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).” 5) This method refers to a person who continually searches out different doctors to prescribe the same medications in order to feed their addictions. I think most of us either know or have known individuals or even family members who have resorted to this type of behavior in order to get prescription drugs for this purpose.

The most common types of drugs that are often abused are central nervous system depressants such as benzodiazepines or tranquilizers, frequently prescribed for anxiety and sleeping disorders, opioids and narcotics for pain relief, and stimulants such as those given for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, (ADHD), narcolepsy, and obesity. 6) (Prescription Drug Abuse Chart – Drugs of Abuse and Related Topics – NIDA, 2009)

“ For example, U. S. prescriptions for stimulants (including those taken for ADHD) increased from around 5 million in 1991 to almost 35 million in 2007. Prescriptions for opioid painkillers such as oxycodone (OxyContin) and hydrocodone (Vicodin) increased from 40 million in 1991 to 180 million in 2007.” 7) (Mayo Clinic, 2008).

I feel the reasons for this significant increase in prescription drug abuse is simple. We live in a society today that tells you a pill can cure and solve all of your problems no matter what they are. All we have to do is turn on the television and see the constant bombardment of advertisements for the latest prescription drugs on the market. As a result, the pharmaceutical industry is making billions of dollars off of people and is certainly not going to complain, thus encouraging and driving the epidemic even more. Furthermore, these drugs are relatively easy to obtain and are socially acceptable by the vast majority of the public compared to illegal drugs.

In just the past several years, we have seen the emergence and proliferation of many “ pain clinics” throughout the United States. Although not all are bad, some of these facilities as stated by 8) (Silverman & Brown, MD, 2009), “ are often non-physician owned and operate just inside the law. The physicians who practice in these facilities are rarely accredited through board certification processes, and many take no insurance and advertise confidential, cash only services. Some even advertise armed guards in the waiting rooms. With no oversight, these facilities serve as a source for a continuous supply of controlled substances to often times addicted and sometimes naïve people. It is not uncommon to find patients of these

facilities receiving tens of thousands of milligrams of opioid medications each month.”

With these types of programs and clinics operating and encouraging such drug abuse, I feel that the people who really need these medications are often the ones who suffer, such as individuals with painful terminal diseases and illnesses like cancer. I experienced this first-hand with my mother several years ago when she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer that had metastasized to her bones, and helplessly watched her suffer from pain. While she was undergoing radiation treatments at a cancer clinic, her doctor there stated that she should use Advil to help with her pain and that the government was cracking down on schedule drugs that were prescribed. My response to this is, if cancer patients can't get the necessary pain medications they desperately need, yet addicts can get all they want, then there is something very wrong with this country we live in and our health care system.

### **Conclusion.**

What is important to recognize and become aware of about prescription drug abuse is that it is much the same as other forms of illegal drug abuse such as cocaine or heroin, and no one is immune. It can be just as dangerous and deadly as other illicit drugs, and affects individuals of all ages, races, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. It can also destroy families, jobs, and homes as well as having fatal health consequences. In fact, use of prescription drugs now causes more deaths than heroin and cocaine combined, according to the U. S. Drug Enforcement Administration.” 9) (Treatment Solutions Network, 2009).

Furthermore, with the recent tragic and untimely deaths of celebrities such as Michael Jackson, Anna Nicole Smith, and Heath Ledger related to prescription drug abuse, I feel this problem is finally being brought to the forefront and exposed, bringing a much needed awareness to the dangers and consequences of abusing prescription drugs.

**References:**

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