

Addiction to prescription drugs in the uk: a public health disaster



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Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem all across the UK, dependency on prescription drugs can be just as harmful as addiction to street drugs, such as cannabis. The most common prescription drugs to be misused are opiates, antidepressants and stimulants. Prescription drug addiction of medications such as painkillers, are carried out by people who do not need the drugs therapeutic effects but use them more as a mood switcher (Addiction Helper 2018). According to NHS data, in England, one in every 11 patients are being prescribed medication which can be addictive or difficult to stop taking (BBC News 2018). Doctors prescribing addictive medication on a daily basis can result in the population becoming reliant on these medications and using them more for pleasure than for pain treatment. This essay will discuss what addiction is, the three groups of prescription drugs which are most commonly misused (Opioids, antidepressants and stimulants), examples of different drugs which fall into these categories, why they are harmful and the reason for why they are leading us to a public health disaster.

Addiction spreads to every kind of pleasurable behaviour such as, drinking or smoking and is considered to be a chronic disease. Some substances or activities may give you so much pleasure that living without it is not possible or worthwhile (Human Givens Institute 2018). Repeated use of drugs can lead to changes occurring in the brain and can affect one's self control and the ability to resist taking drugs (Drugabuse. gov 2018). The human brain is functioned in a certain way which makes you want to repeat activities which give you pleasure or make you feel good and makes you feel motivated to do them again. The drugs which are addictive target the brains rewarding

system. The human brain is flooded with a chemical known as dopamine. Dopamine then triggers a feeling of pleasure which then encourages you to take the drug (Official Website Of Cadac Online 2018).

Opioids are a group of drugs which are found from the opium poppy plant, they work in the brain in order to produce different effects. One of these effects is to relieve any ongoing pain, which is why they are referred to as painkillers. Many of the opioids prescribed through prescription are used to block any pain signals between the brain and our body. Alongside controlling the pain, they can help you feel relaxed and this is one reason for why they are addictive and patients start to misuse them (Drugabuse. gov 2018).

Frequent use of opioids or any other group of prescription drugs can increase your dependence on them, which means you start taking them even when they are not needed only because you feel they will help. The most common opioid drugs to be misused are Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, Codeine and Morphine (Drugabuse. gov 2018) which all fall under the schedule 2 drugs category (GOV. UK 2018). Schedule 2 drugs, are drugs which have high potential for abuse and are very dangerous (HealthyChildren. org 2018). This is why when you collect a schedule 2 drug, the pharmacist will ask you for some proof of your identity and you will also have to sign the back of your prescription as proof of you collecting the medication (nhs. uk 2018).

Overdosing on opioids is harmful and can have serious consequences. One of the health issues which can arise from overdose is severe respiratory depression. This is the slowing or even stopping of breathing which could lead to death (Drugabuse. gov 2018). Addiction to opioids is UK's public

health disaster, as it has many negative effects to our body and its functions in many ways.

Antidepressants are a group of drugs which reduce symptoms of depressive disorders. They do this by correcting any imbalances of neurotransmitters in the brain, which may be the reason for any behaviour or mood changes.

Neurotransmitters are the body's chemical messengers, used by the nervous system to transmit messages to other neurons or muscles (Queensland Brain Institute 2018). They are inside the vesicles which are found in the nerve cells and are released by one nerve then collected by another. If a neurotransmitter is not taken by some other nerve the nerve which released it takes it back and this is known as reuptake. Serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine are neurotransmitters present in the brain and are the neurotransmitters which are specific to depression (Ogbru 2018).

Dependence on antidepressants can form in those patients who were wrongly prescribed antidepressants at the start and didn't actually require it (Addictioncenter. com 2018).

SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) are the most common antidepressants prescribed to patients in the UK. The reason why they are preferred over other antidepressant medications is because they don't have as many side effects, and if an overdose does happen then it isn't as serious. Fluoxetine is the most common antidepressant prescribed to patients in the UK, the other antidepressants which are often prescribed are citalopram and sertraline. Like with any other medication you take, SSRIs have side effects too. The common ones being, headaches, nausea and muscle pain however, a more serious side effect is a reduction in the body's blood clotting capacity <https://assignbuster.com/addiction-to-prescription-drugs-in-the-uk-a-public-health-disaster/>

due to the platelets lacking a neurotransmitter called serotonin (Harvard Health 2018). Reduction in the body's blood clotting capacity means your body won't be able to clot blood as quick as it did before. There is growing evidence to show that patients on antidepressants struggle to stop taking them once they have started. However, if they do manage to stop taking them, many people end up getting withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms include anxiety, stomach upsets, sleeping difficulties, and memory and attention problems. Doctors believe that if patients experience anxiety or psychological symptoms which continue for a while then it may mean that their original issues are returning. This means patients will have to go back to taking antidepressants or take them for longer if they are still taking them (Wilson 2016).

Stimulants are drugs or substances which increase the activity of the nervous system for a short amount of time. When a stimulant is taken, dopamine levels increase in the brain which then helps boost your mood and leaves you feeling great (Mazzitti & Sullivan 2017). Prescription stimulants are usually prescribed to patients who suffer from Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcoleps, a condition where patients fall asleep whenever they have relaxing surroundings around them. According to an article published by Chloe Harman, abuse of stimulants which are prescribed to patients through prescription is high in the UK, in fact it is the highest in Europe (Harman 2016). With regular use of stimulants there is a high chance you will develop tolerance to the drug and therefore your body will then require higher doses of the stimulant to give you the same feeling as it did when you first started taking it. This is one of the reasons to why

addiction can develop to stimulants. The most common stimulant to be prescribed to patients in the UK is Methylphenidate known by various brand names such as Ritalin, Equasym and Concerta. Methylphenidate is a controlled drug as it falls under the schedule 2 drug group, therefore has to be given to patients with care.

With more health issues arising in the UK, it is common for doctors to regularly prescribe opioids to relieve pain, antidepressants for depressive disorders and stimulants for patients who suffer from Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or narcoleps as a source of treatment. However, the fact that the drugs prescribed to treat these conditions are addictive cannot be denied. Opioids, antidepressants and stimulants being the drug groups most prescribed to patients are leading UK to a public health disaster, not only are they addictive but they can arise other health conditions in patients as well. Frequent use of opioids is a public health disaster as, opioids alter the functioning of the brain. With patients taking it even when it is not required, they are doing themselves harm, it also means they will build tolerance and later on when they do suffer from pain normal opioid dosage would not work and they would require higher dosages or more strong, expensive medications which have serious side effects. Antidepressants, just like opioids can be addictive too and are leading us to a public health disaster as well. Frequent use can affect your health just like opioids. One of the health issues which can arise is that your blood clotting capacity can reduce which means in serious injuries or accidents your body will lose more blood than normal. If a lot of blood is lost, then blood transfusion may be required which isn't an easy process. Lastly, stimulants which are mainly

used for patients suffering from ADHD or Nacoleps has already been highlighted to be the most abused in UK out of the whole of Europe.

Addiction to stimulants is leading UK to a public health disaster as long-term use of stimulants has severe side effects which include, extreme weight loss, cardiovascular damage, stroke, seizure and reduced sexual functioning. All these side effects can have serious effects on the users health which may also be life long.

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