



Prescription and Over the Counter Medicine Abuse

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Medicine abuse (inappropriate use of prescription and over-the-counter medications) has been of rising national concern in recent years. No longer is it just grandma sharing medications with a friend, children having accidentally taken that pill they found on the floor or people coming to the emergency room having ingested more than their prescribed dose (because if one works, two works better!). The incidence of abuse screams of importance now due to the abuse by our children and teens.

National studies point to interesting information:

- Nearly one in five teens try a prescription medication (Vicodin, Ritalin, Adderall, Oxycontin) to get high. One in ten report abusing cough medicine and most do not believe this to be risky.
- Two in five think there is “nothing wrong” with using prescription medicines “once in awhile” (even if not theirs) and nearly three in ten do not believe prescription pain relievers are addictive (even without a doctor’s prescription)
- Seven of the top ten drugs used to get high are prescription medications.
- Young adults/college aged youth having abused prescription drugs to get high has risen dramatically over the past decade. *(CASA 2007)*

Data, from the Calhoun County MiPHY/Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth 2010 survey tell us that teens are misusing prescription medications locally as well:

Without a doctor’s prescription within the last 30 days.....	Took a prescription drug	Took a painkiller
7 th grade	5.60%	13.30%
9 th grade	2.80%	9.40%
11 th grade	6.20%	8.50%

More middle school youth are using than those in high school; females are abusing more painkillers than males and males are abuse more prescription medication than girls at both the middle and high school levels.

Why is medicine abuse on the rise? Access to medications is fairly easy with 70% of teens saying they’ve gotten them from family or friends (likely not with ill intent). Most do not understand or believe the addiction potential. After all, it is medicine! Teens report using medicines to escape, relieve boredom, or to get “an edge” in competition for

college admission. They believe them to be safer than using “street drugs” and their perception is that everyone uses! Consider, also, the dramatic increase in advertising of medications since 1997 and that a standard answer to any degree of pain or discomfort is to ‘take a pill.’ While the number of prescriptions has increased dramatically since the early 1990’s and are generally prescribed responsibly, it will take commitments from physicians, pharmacists, patients, parents, and others to prevent inappropriate use or the diversion of medications.

Signs of possible abuse (use of medicine beyond what it is intended or prescribed for) include:

- Excessive sweating, urination or thirst
- Rapid heart beat
- Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting
- Uncontrollable diarrhea
- Spastic shaking, loss of motor control
- Drowsiness, dizziness and insomnia
- Loss of consciousness
- Hospitalization due to overdose and/or other physical consequences.

Parents are encouraged to be aware of terms used to refer to prescription drug abuse:

- phishing: pooling pills with friends and scooping them randomly up for ingestion
- pharming: parties where youth share meds to get high (sometimes washing them down with alcohol)
- robo-tripping or skittling: high dose uses of, primarily, DXM (an over-the-counter cough suppressant in cold medications), Robitussin or Coricidin.

Current action in Calhoun County to address medicine abuse include raising awareness of parents, youth and the general public about abuse issues; increasing opportunities for safe and appropriate disposal of unused, expired medications; work across sectors of the community involving all in making changes to decrease incidence of abuse.

To adequately decrease medicine abuse and addiction takes the commitment of the community. Ways you can make an impact include:

- Set clear and consistent rules for youth avoiding inappropriate access and use
- Explain and role model appropriate use, explain the cautions with correct usage and the dangers of abuse
- Think before you share a (prescription) medication with another; the suggested guide is “don’t do it” as it is against the law and medically not recommended. Medications are prescribed for individuals based on individual considerations. Follow your physician's advice.
- Keep medicines locked or unavailable to children and teens (your own or visiting family and friends). Remove them from the home or safeguard them if selling your home and hosting an open house to the public.

As a community, we can seek to avoid accidental poisoning, abuse and addiction when we take preventive action, are responsible in our personal use and know how to respond to potential or real problems with medication use.

Resources:

Substance Abuse Council; Rx Drug House Tour : www.TheAntiDrug.com; www.Fivemoms.com