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June 13, 2016

Prescription Drug Use Among Teens and Young Adults

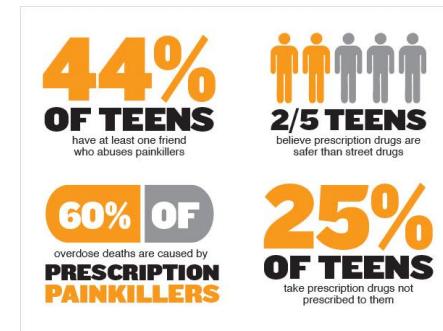
The severity of prescription drug abuse among teens and young adults has become a pertinent issue as more and more young individuals are turning to these drugs for various reasons. Past and current policy have attempted to combat the issue by making recommendations and best practices suggestions in both prevention and educational opportunities that have been successful elsewhere. Still, additional attention to the topic is needed in order to deter the overall problem at hand.

Scope of the Problem

Teens and young adults face extreme pressures in today's society to experiment with drugs and other substances such as marijuana, alcohol, and other "gateway" drugs, potentially leading to risky behaviors. Teens and young adults often turn to prescription medications such as Adderall and Ritalin for recreational, and study purposes.

However, the biggest issue among prescription drug abuse stems from the use of Opiates. Examples of Opiates include Hydrocodone, Morphine, and Oxycodone. Although overall drug use is on the decline, prescription drug use, specifically Opiate abuse, among teens and young adults is quickly rising. Teens and young adults usually have access to these medications in medicine cabinets in their own home, are prescribed them, or know someone who was or is prescribed these pain killers. Therefore, these drugs are easily accessible. The dangers with these drugs is the casual mentality associated with them. Teens and young adults often think that because these drugs are prescribed or are found in their home, that they are safe to consume. However, among Morphine, Oxycodone, and Hydrocodone is Heroin which is an illegal substance. The challenge with this is sometimes, after an individual finishes a

prescription such as Oxycodone, or Hydrocodone, their body physically depends on the drug. However, if the prescription is discontinued, the dependence will demand another source of the drug. This source often leads to the usage of Heroin. Because Heroin is an Opiate, it results in the desired effect, only to deepen the individual's dependence. Similarly, the diverted use of legally prescribed substances can be highly addictive, life altering, and even deadly (Prescription for Disaster 2011).



Past Policy

In 2010, the Obama Administration addressed the issue of prescription and drug abuse with its first National Drug Control Strategy. The objective of this strategy was to, "[chart] a new course in efforts to reduce illicit drug use and its consequences in the United States" (Office of National Drug Control Policy 2015).

Following this action, the federal government unprecedentedly developed the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan of 2011. The Plan of 2011 followed the seven core areas of the National Drug Control Strategy including prevention, early intervention, improving information systems, obstructing domestic drug trafficking, and strengthening international partnerships (2011 National Drug Control Strategy 2011).

The Plan also identified how pharmaceutical drug use affects certain groups more than others. Among these groups are veterans and active duty military, women, college students, and those already involved with the criminal justice system. Focusing on these groups, the 2011 plan placed additional emphasis on areas and communities with unique challenges. Following the 2011 plan, the federal government released a yearly plan from 2011 to 2015, keeping the intention of the original seven focus areas outlined in the 2010 National Drug Control Strategy (Office of National Drug Control Strategy 2015).

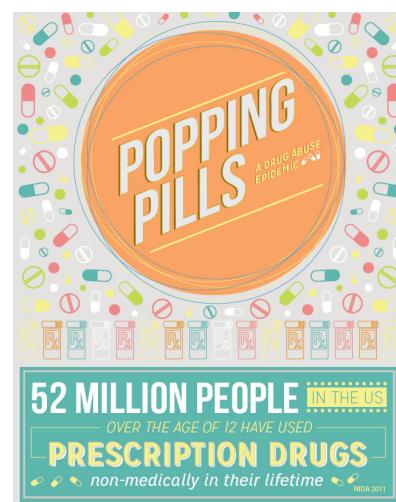
Current Policy



As a growing issue, there has been great attention to the issue of prescription drug and over-the-counter drug abuse. As an extension of the Obama Administration's National Drug Control Strategy, the Prescription Drug Abuse

Prevention Plan aims to combat prescription drug abuse by focusing on four main areas including "education, enhancement and increased utilization of monitoring programs, the development of consumer-friendly and environmentally-responsible prescription drug disposal programs, and providing law enforcement agencies with support and the

needed tools to shut down 'pill mills'" (Epidemic 2011). With this plan, multiple goals including working with federal agencies to develop educational opportunities and proper disposal methods, monitoring and practice agreements involving pharmacists, passing legislation regarding prescribers training, decreasing the number of unintentional overdose deaths and many more have been established as a call to action for the future fight against this issue (Epidemic 2011).



The Controlled Substance Act of 1970, which regulated the manufacturing, importation, possession, use, and distribution of certain substances, was amended by the Disposal Act "to give the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) authority to promulgate new regulations," that allows users to turn in "unused pharmaceutical controlled substances to appropriate entities" in order ensure the safe disposal of the substance (Disposal Regulations: Registrant Fact Sheet). The Disposal Act was developed with the intention to motivate public and private entities to implement multiple different procedures to collect and dispose of substances in a safe and convenient way (Disposal Regulations: Registrant Fact Sheet).

The policy surrounding this issue is a crucial element in solving the problem at hand. The policy involved has the ability to not only prevent abuse, but also save lives. Teen and young adult prescription drug abuse is a crippling problem to our society and needs to be further addressed in order to prevent life-long dependencies.

Policy Options and Model Programs

Education for Parents

Studies conducted in rural and frontier communities of Alaska found that parents were more aware of the dangers associated with prescription drugs and were more likely to restrict the access of prescription medications when encouraged by the Home Environmental Strategy (HES). Strategies used were events such as “Family Nights” (Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse, 2016).

Increase the Number of National “Take-Back Days”

By increasing the number of national or even regional and local take-back days, citizens are provided with more opportunities to discard unused medications in a safe and convenient way. The organization “Take Back Your Meds” comprised of 270 health organizations, police, drugstores, and local governments is located in Washington. This organization has been particularly successful with educating citizens on the correct procedure of disposal and medication safety, as well as, removing potentially harmful substances from citizens’ homes (Take Back Your Meds 2010).

SmartRX: Web-Based Intervention

As a “multimedia, Web-based education, and intervention program,” SmartRX focuses on a series of 5 classes with topics including analgesics, stimulants, antidepressants, sedative-hypnotics, and tranquilizers. This series teaches individuals the “medication properties of these prescriptions,” how to properly and safely use these drugs with their associated responsibility, and self-management strategies to treat health. This program was successfully utilized in West Virginia and Ohio, where participants illustrated a better understanding of the medicinal properties and more confidence in following a physician’s directions (Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse 2016).

Dosing Guidelines for Prescribers

Dosing guidelines are a resource for prescribers to access additional information on appropriate levels of prescription drug use and effective dosage amounts for different patients with different characteristics and symptoms. A study conducted in the state of Washington cited that the usage of these guidelines showed declines “in the monthly prevalence of prescription use, number of individuals with an prescription who received chronic opioid therapy, and the odds that an individual with a prescription would receive high dosages (Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse 2016).

Statewide Media Campaign

A statewide media campaign can be an effective educational strategy, especially when targeting teens and young adults. The campaign could focus on the prevention of prescription drug misuse, improve best practices, and aid in reducing the harm caused by the misuse of prescription drugs. This practice was implemented in Utah in which respondents agreed afterward that they were less likely to share prescriptions, or use prescriptions that were not theirs. Some respondents even claimed they disposed of left over prescription drugs they had due to the campaign (Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse 2016).

Education for Future Students or Patients

Provide more educational opportunities focusing on the danger of prescription drugs and the consequences of them. This education will be geared toward patients and families, and can come in the form of discussion with healthcare providers, pamphlets, warnings on medications, and courses in schools. An example of this is the “Think Smart” program, focused on teaching students multiple lessons including alternatives to drug use and how to refuse drugs. This program was successful in Alaska (Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse, 2016).

Policy Options and Model Programs continued...

Recreational Community Based Centers for Adolescents

Centers for children and teens can serve as a collaborating effort in which these young individuals can not only receive education on the risks of prescription drug abuse, but can also formulate social relationships and develop a meaningful purpose for their lives in which they have goals and aspirations for the future; something that when lacking can often lead to an increased risk in partaking in these activities.

Glossary of Terms

Prescription Drugs: A pharmaceutical drug that legally requires a medical prescription to be dispensed in order to obtain.

Sedative-Hypnotic: A chemical substance that is used for a sedative effect or to reduce tension and anxiety.

This can be used for calming effects in low doses and sleep-inducing effects at higher doses.

Tranquilizers: A medicinal drug taken to induce a calming effect in order to reduce tension or anxiety.

Pill Mills: Doctor, pharmacy, or clinic that is prescribing or distributing powerful narcotics illegally for non-medical reasons.

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Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

This brief was produced by CPI Undergraduate Fellows, community experts, and faculty.

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Funding generously provided by:

The Review Foundation
&
The Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation

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