

The Prescription Drug Abuse Epidemic - Overview and Future Outlook

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Prescription drug abuse is the nation's fastest growing drug problem and is classified as an "epidemic" according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC also states that more Americans now die from painkillers than from heroin and cocaine combined, and prescription drug-induced deaths are higher than those from automobile accidents.

The landscape of America's drug problem has changed, and familiar street drugs are being replaced by the nonmedical use of prescription drugs -- an issue that affects businesses, industries and schools throughout the world.

The class of narcotic pain relievers known as opioids is largely contributing to the prescription drug abuse epidemic, apparent by the fact that the use of these powerful medications increased by a staggering 380% in only 10 years!



What Are Opioids And How Do They Work?

Opioids (also called narcotics) are drugs that alleviate pain, depress body functions and reactions, and when taken in large doses, cause a strong euphoric feeling. They are considered Schedule II drugs under the Controlled Substance Act because they have a strong potential for abuse or addiction.

The opioid class of narcotics includes morphine, codeine, and heroin. Synthetic opiates are hydrocodone (Vicodin[®]), hydromorphone (Dilaudid[®]), oxycodone (Oxycontin[®], Percodan[®]), meperidine (Demerol[®]) and propoxyphene (Darvon[®], Darvocet[®]) and methadone. Common side effects include drowsiness and mental confusion, and depending on the dosage, can depress respiration – leading to respiratory distress and death.

An Overview Of The Problem

In a 2011 survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, it was reported that after marijuana and alcohol, prescription drugs are the **most commonly abused substance in the U. S.**, accounting for one death every 19 minutes. In fact, enough opioid pain relievers are sold every year to medicate **every adult in the United States** with a typical dose of 5 mg of hydrocodone every four hours for a month.

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