

Position Paper:
PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUG USE

Prescription drugs are licensed medicines regulated by laws and require a physician's prescription for a person to obtain them. These medications are safe if taken as prescribed by the person for whom they are intended. Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are available without prescriptions and like prescription drugs; they are safe when used according to package directions or a medical professional's recommendations. Some OTC medications have active ingredients with the potential for misuse at higher-than-recommended dosages. Another misuse of OTC medications is mixing them together to create new products. The availability of over-the-counter and prescription medications in the medicine cabinets at home makes it easier for young people to have access to these drugs. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggest locking up all prescription medication in the home to help avoid access to children and teens.

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to abusing these drugs because they do not perceive over the counter or prescription drugs as having negative consequences nor do they think they will get into trouble for using them because they are legal. Teens use these drugs because they relieve pain, reduce anxiety, help them sleep, give them pleasure, enhance sociability, help them lose weight and give them the perception of doing better in school and sports

Pharming is something young people have engaged in by taking handfuls of drugs (prescription and over-the-counter) and ingesting them. This is often done at parties and dangerously often with alcohol. Over-the-counter cold medicines, particularly with dextromethorphan (DXM) can also be abused. These are often inexpensive and easy to access. Other over-the-counter medicines that have been misused include motion sickness pills and sleep aids. Misuse of these drugs can lead to liver damage and central nervous system issues including breathing and irregular heartbeat.

“Effective August 2013, NYS Public Health Law requires most prescribers of controlled substances consult New York’s online Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) Registry. The same law allows pharmacists to consult (not require) the registry.

Veterinarians are exempt from the requirement to consult the PMP Registry. However, veterinarians and other dispensing practitioners are required to report controlled substance dispensing activity to the New York State Department of Health Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE) within 24 hours.”¹ The purpose of this law is to give access to prescribers and pharmacists the ability to view patient’s history of controlled substance prescribing and dispensing.

Key Facts

- From 2014 -2016, 27,779,628 prescriptions were written and tracked through the NYS Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) (NYS Department of Health)
- In 2017, 14.0% of students in the United States had ever misused prescription opioids. (The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System)
- 1.5 million American kids have reported they have misused prescription or over-the-counter drugs. (NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services)
- In 2016, an estimated 6.2 million Americans aged 12 or older misused psychotherapeutic drugs at least once in the past month, which represent 2.3 percent of the population aged 12 or older. Of the four categories of prescription drugs that are presented in this report, prescription pain relievers were the most commonly misused by people aged 12 or older. The 6.2 million people aged 12 or older who misused prescription psychotherapeutic drugs in the past month included 3.3 million who misused prescription pain relievers in that period. Approximately 2.0 million

¹ https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/narcotic/prescription_monitoring/

people aged 12 or older misused prescription tranquilizers in the past month. An estimated 1.7 million people aged 12 or older misused prescription stimulants, and 497,000 (0.5 million) misused prescription sedatives in the past month. (2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health)

- More than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2016, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids. That number is nearly double in only one decade. (CDC)

Recommendations for PTA

There are a number of actions and programs PTAs can undertake to help prevent and combat prescription and over-the counter drug abuse.

- Educate members: PTAs can provide ongoing up-to-date information about use and abuse of medications including health concerns, dangers, risk factors, and current trends. Parents should be encouraged to utilize resources such as community education programs from the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services and obtain appropriate free resources from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- Safeguard medications: Parents need to be aware of what medications are in their home. Ask family members and friends to also keep track and lock up their medications. They need to monitor both the amounts of medications consumed and who is taking these medications. PTAs need to encourage members to keep track of any medications in their home and provide practical resources parents can use.
- Medication disposal initiatives: PTAs need to work along with local law enforcement to promote and coordinate safe disposal of medications. The federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) oversees national drug take back initiatives.
- Coordinate efforts with educators/health providers/pharmacies: PTA units can work with local educators, health care providers, and pharmacies to promote honest communication about the health and safety issues related to prescription and over the counter drug abuse.
- Work with legislators: PTAs can provide a parent perspective to legislators regarding physicians over prescribing medications and pharmacists identifying people who go from pharmacy to pharmacy (pharmacy shop) to fill multiple prescriptions filled for purposes of misuse and selling drugs.

Summary

Over-the-counter and prescription drug abuse has become an epidemic. Teens are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of this abuse. Some of these drugs may even become addictive, especially when used in a manner inconsistent to their labeling or by taken in a manner or dosage other than prescribed. PTAs need to be proactive with education and advocacy as a means of stopping this out of control problem.

Adopted 7/18