

Position Paper
PRESCRIPTION AND OVER THE COUNTER DRUG ABUSE

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.

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 and give them the perception of doing better in school and sports. The lack of controls on Internet pharmacies has provided additional access to obtain medications illegally.

To combat the rise in overdoses of opiates (prescription and non-prescription), NYS passed a law in 2006 making it legal for non-medical persons to administer Naloxone to prevent opiate overdoses from becoming fatal. In July 2011, NYS 911 Good Samaritan Law was signed into law. This law is designed to encourage a witness or victim of a substance related emergency to call 911 to save an overdose victim's life. This new policy gives legal amnesty to individuals who are in need of medical treatment resulting from drug use, as well as the individuals who seek help for someone else in need of medical assistance. The law protects both parties from being charged or prosecuted for possession.

Key Facts

- In 2010, about 12 million Americans (age 12 or older) reported nonmedical uses of prescription painkillers in the past year. Overdose deaths have tripled since 1990 and have never been higher. Prescription opioid painkillers cause nearly three out of four prescription drug overdoses. Every year, nearly 15,000 people die from overdoses involving these drugs—more than those who die from heroin and cocaine combined. (Centers for Disease Control CDC)
- 20.2% of high school students have taken prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription. (The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, NYS OASAS)
- 4.5 million American kids have reported that they have abused prescription drugs. 2.1 million American kids have intentionally abused cough syrup. Half of teens do not see a great risk in abusing prescription (Rx) or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. 1 in 3 teens report having a close friend who abuses Rx pain relievers to get high. 1 in 4 teens report having a close friend who abuses cough medicine to get high. Only 31% of teens “learn a lot about the risk of drugs” from their parents. Emergency room visits due to abuse of prescription drugs are more than the number of visits due to marijuana and heroin combined. (NYS Department of Health)

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 and disseminate information about NYS Department of Health overdose prevention training opportunities. Parents should be encouraged to utilize resources such as community education programs from the Partnership for Drug Free America and obtain appropriate free resources can be obtained from the National Institute on Drug Abuse
- **Safeguard medications:** Parents need to be aware of what medications are in their home. 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 overprescribing 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. PTAs should support the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for states including to advocate for legislation improving prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs), which are electronic databases that track all prescriptions for painkillers, to identify improper prescribing of painkillers, to address improper patient use of painkillers, to pass, enforce and evaluate pill mill, doctor shopping and other laws to reduce prescription painkiller abuse, to encourage professional licensing boards to take action against inappropriate prescribing and to increase access to substance abuse treatment.

Summary

Over-the-counter and prescription drug abuse has become an epidemic. Teens are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of this abuse. PTAs need to be proactive with education and advocacy as a means of stopping this out of control problem.

Prescription and Over the Counter Drug Abuse Resource List

National

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/Features/VitalSigns/PainkillerOverdoses

www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/?source=govdelivery

The Partnership at Drugfree.Org

www.drugfree.org



PACT 360: Community Education Programs: Drug Prevention and Early Intervention Education for Parents and Youth

www.pact360.org

The National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.drugabuse.gov

www.nida.nih.gov

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/prescriptiondrugabuse.html

The Drug Enforcement Agency

www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com

National Association of School Nurses (NASN) Smart Moves Smart Choices Program

www.smartmovessmartchoices.org

New York State

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services

www.oasas.ny.gov

www.oasas.ny.gov/AdMed/rx/index.cfm

www.oasas.ny.gov/publications/pdf/MedicineCabBrochure.pdf

New York State Department of Health

www.healthy.ny.gov

www.health.ny.gov/publications/1019.pdf

www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/harm_reduction/opioidprevention

www.health.ny.gov/publications/1021.pdf

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