



Prescription Opioids can Lead to Heroin Use

Use of prescription opioids has contributed to the national heroin crisis. While we see more marijuana and alcohol use in the teens we treat, ASAP is also concerned about the potential for heroin use among younger populations. We counsel parents to seek help for their children before a child's Substance Use Disorder becomes more severe. Our staff communicates with physicians (with signed releases) to give them information that may impact their prescribing for our clients.

How Big is the Problem?

In 2013, approximately 46 people died in the US each day from an overdose of prescription pain pills. The total number of deaths was nearly 17,000 people.

In 2015 (the most recent year available), 52,404 people died from lethal drug overdoses. 20,101 deaths were from prescription pain pills and another 12,990 were related to heroin.

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For each person who dies from these drugs, about 30 people are admitted into the emergency room. That means over half a million people each year have an issue with pain pills which require a hospital visit. Law enforcement, governmental leaders, and citizens have become increasingly aware of the heroin crisis that is affecting many communities in the US.

Are Opioids Really that Dangerous?

Opioids are very dangerous. The FDA affirmed its belief that the benefits of prescription opioids outweigh the risks in approving Zohydro ER, a long-acting version of hydrocodone. Many state attorneys general have asked the FDA to reconsider its decision to allow Zohydro. These officials are concerned about potential misuse and abuse.

The misuse and over-prescribing of prescription opioids have also led to an increase in the use of heroin in this country. Drugabuse.gov reports, "Prescription opioid pain medications such as Oxycontin and Vicodin can have effects similar to heroin when taken in [larger] doses or in ways [like crushing] other than prescribed, and they are currently among the most commonly abused drugs in the United States. Research now suggests that abuse of these drugs may open the door to heroin abuse."

Who is Affected?

[Consumer Reports](#) notes that Americans have misconceptions about opioid risks, thinking that they apply to other people. A "typical" opioid overdose victim is not someone who is drug seeking. Approximately 60% of those who overdose are using drugs prescribed by one physician. Many of those patients overdosed while on a low dose. NPR and Truven Health Analytics conducted a health survey in May 2014 which found that many people (36%) are most concerned about addiction when choosing to take a prescription opioid.

Especially concerning for parents of adolescents, is the drugabuse.gov reporting about young heroin users. "Nearly half of young people who inject heroin surveyed in three recent studies reported abusing prescription opioids before starting to use heroin. Some individuals reported

taking up heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain than prescription opioids. Many of these young people also report that crushing prescription opioid pills to snort or inject the powder provided their initiation into these methods of drug administration.”

Why Would Prescription Opioids be Prescribed?

When used properly, opioids can reduce short-term severe pain, such as after surgery. Prescription opioids can also manage chronic pain from long-term illnesses, like cancer. Many people inadvertently use them incorrectly by combining them with other substances like alcohol or sleeping pills. Others take them in too high a dose or for too long. Patients should never take opioids while driving or in other situations that require a high level of alertness.

Dr. Richard Baum, President/Psychologist of ASAP, recommends, “any legally prescribed opioids should be secured in your home when you need them. Dispose of leftover pills to avoid others misusing your prescription. Many addicts (and teens looking to experiment) gain easy access to opioids left in a medicine cabinet ‘just in case’. Pharmacies may take back unused medications to dispose of them. Police departments often offer prescription drug discard programs several times per year to help cut down on this problem.”

Finding Solutions to the Heroin Crisis



There are many different reasons why people are misusing prescription opioids. Doctors, medical organizations, and lawmakers are working to change prescribing standards to reduce the chance of misuse. Law enforcement is working to stop drug trafficking. Communities are spreading the word about the dangers associated with prescription opioids and heroin.

If you know someone who is misusing [any substance](#), [treatment](#) is available. You don't need to wait until someone is using heroin. Many people who begin misusing prescription drugs or heroin

first used another substance. Seeking treatment early gives clients the best chance for success.