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NEWS RELEASE

Prescription Drug Overdose Becomes the Second Leading Cause of Accidental Death

Addiction Shreds the Emotional Fabric of Families

Prescription drug overdose is now the second leading cause of accidental death in the United States. (Motor vehicle deaths are first.) Approximately 26,000 Americans are dying from prescription drug overdoses annually, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Nearly 120,000 Americans go to hospital emergency rooms after overdosing on painkillers. “Addiction to prescription drugs is now one of the nation’s most serious drug problems,” according to Rod Colvin, author of *Overcoming Prescription Drug Addiction*.

“Millions of Americans from every demographic group have fallen into the addiction trap, and it is shredding the emotional fabric of families across the nation. Not only are families losing loved ones, but addiction takes an emotional toll on the entire family—no one escapes the pain and chaos when a loved one is destroying himself or herself with prescription drugs.” Further, this epidemic costs millions of dollars in health care, traffic accidents, joblessness, and absenteeism.

Colvin’s passion for writing the book was fueled by the death of his 35-year-old brother, who died as a result of his long-term addiction to prescription painkillers. “I’ve experienced firsthand what addiction does to individuals and their families,” Colvin said. “Unfortunately the problem has escalated over the last decade.” Prescription drug abuse now outranks the use of all illegal drugs combined, coming in second only to marijuana use.

What are the messages of *Overcoming Prescription Drug Addiction*? In this clearly written, thoroughly researched guide, Colvin provides a comprehensive resource for addicts, their families and friends, and health-care professionals wanting to better understand and cope with a problem that has been too long ignored. Among the topics he discusses:

- the nature of addiction as a chronic, progressive disease
- drugs of addiction and how they hijack the brain
- the most commonly abused prescription drugs
- steps to take if you or a loved one has become hooked on drugs
- the effects shame and embarrassment can have on your desire to get help
- treatment options, including medical detox and family interventions

Colvin also offers compelling stories of recovery from former addicts as well as insights from addiction medicine specialists. He examines how powerful narcotics can be acquired relatively easily through “doctor shopping,” “pharmacy shopping,” and buying drugs from rogue Internet pharmacies. He also investigates steps taken by law enforcement agencies and state governments to curb the diversion of prescription drugs.

Visit the books’ companion Web site: www.prescriptiondrugaddiction.com

About the Author

Rod Colvin’s 35-year-old brother, Randy, died as a result of his long-term addiction to prescription drugs. The loss of his brother became a defining moment in his life. The event was the motivating force behind his decision to write *Overcoming Prescription Drug Addiction*, a comprehensive resource with information, advice, and inspiration for prescription drug addicts and those who love them.

Colvin has spoken on the subject of prescription drug abuse to civic and professional groups across the nation. He has appeared on the *NBC Nightly News*, *MSNBC*; has appeared on numerous other radio and television programs; and has been interviewed for articles in *Redbook* and *Family Circle* magazines and newspapers across the country.

From 2003 to 2005, Colvin served on an advisory commission to the National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University, New York, which conducted a landmark study on prescription drug addiction. The report, *Under the Counter: The Diversion and Abuse of Prescription Drugs in the United States*, is available at www.casacolumbia.org.

Colvin is also the founder and publisher of Addicus Books, an independent publishing house based in Omaha, Nebraska, whose focus is consumer health books. He has written two previous nonfiction books, *Evil Harvest* (Bantam Books, 1992), the true story of a white supremacist murder in America’s heartland, and *First Heroes* (Irvington Publishers, 1987), an investigation into the fate of POWs possibly left behind in Vietnam. He is a former broadcast journalist and a producer of radio and television documentaries.

Colvin holds a bachelor of arts degree from Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, and a master of science degree in counseling psychology from Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

Facts about Prescription Drug Abuse

- Drug overdose deaths are now the second leading cause of death in the U.S. (Traffic accidents are first.) In the 45-54 age group, drug overdose deaths are the leading cause of death. (National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control.)
- In 2005, 33,000 Americans died from prescription drug fatal poisoning. That figure represents a 60% increase over 1999, when 20,000 deaths were reported. (Centers for Disease Control.)
- 17 million Americans, ages 12 and up, report having used prescription drugs—painkillers, sedatives, tranquilizers, or stimulants—for non medical purposes during the past year. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
- More people abuse prescription drugs than cocaine, heroin, Ecstasy, and inhalants combined. Prescription drug abuse is outranked only by marijuana use. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)
- Drug-related emergency room visits involving prescription opioids (painkillers) rose 153 percent from 1995 to 2002. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)
- The number of opioid prescriptions escalated from nearly 40 million in 1991 to 180 million in 2007. That's an increase of 350 percent when the population increased by only 19 percent. (National Institute on Drug Abuse.)
- Illicit trade in prescription narcotics, including fraudulent insurance claims for bogus prescriptions, treatment for fake injuries and other deceptive practices to obtain drugs, drain health insurers of up to \$72.5 billion annually, including up to \$24.9 billion for private insurers. (Coalition Against Insurance Fraud.)
- Statistics on teen drug abuse are alarming:
 - One in five teens (19 percent) have used prescription drugs to get high.
 - One in four teens report having a friend who uses pills to get high.
 - One in three teens report being offered pills for recreational use.
 - Every day, 2,700 teens try a prescription drug for the first time to get high. (Partnership for a Drug-Free America)

Most Abused Prescription Drugs in the United States

1. Alprazolam (*Xanax*)
2. Hydrocodone (*Vicodin, Lorcet, Lortab*)
3. Unspecified benzodiazepines (*Xanax, Valium, Klonopin*)
4. Oxycodone (*OxyContin, Percocet, Percodan, Tylox*)
5. Methadone
6. Clonazepam (*Klonopin*)
7. Propoxyphene (*Darvocet-N, Darvon*)
8. Amphetamine (*Dexedrine*)
9. Lorazepam (*Ativan*)
10. Carisoprodol (*Soma*)
11. Diazepam (*Valium*)
12. Methamphetamine (*Desoxyn, speed*)
13. Trazodone (*Desyrel*)

Source: From Drug Abuse Warning Network Emergency Room Data. Based on drugs mentioned during emergency room visits in 2005.

Ten Things You Should Know if You're Addicted to Prescription Drugs

1. Addiction is a chronic, progressive disease. It is ultimately fatal if not brought under control.
2. You are not alone. Millions of people are struggling with addiction. However, feelings of shame and guilt may cause you to feel lonely and isolated.
3. Addiction virtually “rewires” the brain. The drugs cause the brain to stop producing natural chemicals, so when the drugs are stopped, the brain starts craving them.
4. Once addicted, if you stop taking the drugs abruptly, you will experience withdrawal symptoms, which can include: irritability chills alternating with hot flashes, salivation, nausea, and abdominal cramps.
5. Some drugs of addiction, including benzodiazepines such as Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, should not be stopped abruptly. Withdrawal symptoms could include seizure. Talk to a medical professional about tapering usage gradually.
6. Recovery is possible. Millions of people have recovered; however, most will tell you they needed to ask for help.
7. Feeling helpless and hopeless is part of addiction. These feelings need not stop you from recovering. Forgive yourself for past actions. No one can change the past, but the future is yours.
8. New drugs have been available for several years, can help those addicted to painkillers. For example, Suboxone, prescribed by doctors, eliminates the cravings for drugs and can help you stabilize your life.
9. Life-saving warning: once you are abstinent for a few weeks, you can lose the drug tolerance you had built up. If you relapse and take the same high dosage you may have taken months ago, it can kill you.
10. Most physicians are not trained to diagnose or treat addiction. Go to a doctor who understands addiction. Locate an addiction medicine physician at American Society of Addiction Medicine. www.asam.org

From *Overcoming Prescription Drug Addiction—A Guide to Coping and Understanding*.

Ten Things You Need to Know if Someone You Love is an Addict

1. Addiction is a chronic, progressive disease. It affects everyone in the family circle. No one in the family escapes the pain and chaos that addiction brings.
2. You did not cause the problem, and you cannot fix it.
3. Love does not cure addiction. If it did, there would be few addicts. You can let the addict know that you love them and that you will help them get help with they are ready to get help.
4. Addicts need diagnosis and treatment—not judgement.
5. You cannot talk an addict into seeking recovery. The addict must want to recover. It doesn't work to tell an addict what to do.
6. You cannot control the behavior of another person; however, you can control your own behavior. Seek emotional support for yourself. You're in pain...you, too, need help. Go to a Naranon or Alanon meeting.
7. Look into setting up a family intervention, a high planned arrangement in which family and friends confront the addict and encourage him to enter treatment.
8. Stop making it easy for the addict to stay sick. Do not enable the addiction by rescuing—making excuses, paying bills, etc.
9. Addicts are not having fun. They don't like the life they are living, but they are afraid of giving up their drug of choice.
10. There are no honest addicts. Virtually all addicts must be deceptive in order to maintain their habit.

From *Overcoming Prescription Drug Addiction—A Guide to Coping and Understanding*.

Suggested Interview Questions

1. Your own brother died as a result of long-time prescription drug addiction. Was his addiction something you and your family had dealt with openly for some time?
2. Why is there an alarming trend in teens (one out of five) abusing prescription drugs?
3. Why are record numbers of accidental deaths occurring from prescription drug abuse?
4. How does addiction occur? What happens in the brain?
5. How can people recognize the signs of addiction in themselves or someone else—and what should they do about it?
6. How do people commonly obtain prescription drugs illegally through physicians, pharmacists, and Internet pharmacies?
7. Does taking medication for legitimate pain always lead to addiction?
8. Who is most at risk for prescription drug abuse or misuse?
9. Why are senior citizens especially at risk for addiction to pills?
10. What are the treatment options for prescription drug addiction?
11. How does the newer drug Suboxone help with dependence on opioid drugs?
12. How is methadone used to treat addiction to prescription drugs?
13. What human emotion commonly deters people from seeking help for addiction?
14. What are law enforcement agencies doing to combat the addiction problem?
15. What is prescription drug monitoring and which states have it?
16. When you began researching and writing about this subject, what was the most surprising or unexpected fact you uncovered?

Common Myths about Prescription Drug Abuse

Myth: The abuse of prescription drugs comprises only a small part of the nation's drug problem.

Fact: Prescription drug abuse now outranks the use of all illegal drugs combined, with the exception of marijuana.

Myth: There is no such thing as becoming an addict innocently.

Fact: Many people become “unwitting” addicts. These are often individuals with no prior history of drug abuse, who first started using a prescribed drug for a legitimate medical problem. Then at some point they started increasing the dosages on their own because the drug made them feel better. Gradually the abuse became full-blown addiction.

Myth: Taking a narcotic for an extended time leads to addiction.

Fact: One can become physically dependent on a drug, say a pain medication, over time. If the drug were stopped, the body would experience withdrawal symptoms. However, this type of dependence is not addiction. A patient with physiological dependence can quit the drug, usually by being tapered off it gradually with medical supervision and without admission into a drug treatment program.

Myth: You can quit drugs cold turkey if you really want to.

Fact: The side effects of withdrawal from certain prescribed medications can be dangerous, leading to seizures and even death. It is safer to taper off drugs under medical supervision.

Myth: Once you have overcome addiction to a narcotic, you can safely take other addictive medications.

Fact: Unfortunately, relapse often occurs when recovering drug addicts believe they are not as risk for addiction to other addictive substances. However, people who become addicted to narcotics have a brain chemistry that predisposes them to dependency. This puts them at risk for relapse.

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