

Generation Rx

Welcome back from summer vacation everyone, as I look forward to another year of bringing "health awareness" to the community through my health column. While taking a break from writing in August, I have researched some great topics for the upcoming year. This week's article focuses on a major health issue that many people are unaware of — teenage drug use. As not only a healthcare professional but also a father of four small children, I am concerned about this issue — like many parents are — as my kids grow into their teenage years and beyond. This article is being reprinted with the permission of its author, Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD (hc), FICC (h).

An annual national study of teen drug abuse commissioned by The Partnership for a Drug-Free America reports the disturbing move by U.S. teens toward prescription drugs as their choice for drug abuse. The 25-page report (available at www.drugfree.org) reveals that Vicodin, OxyContin, Ritalin/Adderall, and cough medicine are tried more often by teens abusing drugs than cocaine, ecstasy, LSD,

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heroin and most other street drugs. Only marijuana and inhalants have been tried more often than this list of prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs.

The numbers are a bit frightening. Almost one out of every five teenagers has used a prescription painkiller to get "high." Approximately one in 11 has used an OTC medication such as cough syrup.

According to the survey, this is what our youth are taking:

Vicodin - 18 percent of those polled said they have abused this drug at least once. Vicodin is one of several opioids or narcotics used to treat pain. It gives the abuser a rush similar to heroin.

OxyContin - 10 percent of teens have abused this drug. OxyContin is another opioid painkiller.

Ritalin/Adderall - 10 percent

of teens have abused these drugs, which are stimulants used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

OTC cough medicines - 9 percent of teens have abused cough medications, many of which contain the drug dextromethorphan or "DXM." When taken in larger-than-recommended doses, DXM causes a range of hallucinogenic effects.

One reason America's teens are turning to prescription drugs is their assumed safety. If their medical doctor readily prescribes them, how harmful can they be? Another reason is accessibility. Buying drugs off the street from someone you don't know has some pretty obvious risks. Raiding your mother's medicine cabinet has the appearance of greater safety.

But at the end of the day, drug abuse is still drug abuse. Only these days, it isn't a Colombian cartel or an underground meth lab. The people producing the drugs our children are abusing are the same drug manufacturers that spend billions of dollars each year, convincing consumers that their drugs are the answer to any and all ailments.

Your efforts could prevent a young person from overdosing on a drug they thought was safe

Take another look at the numbers. If you have five teenage patients, chances are at least one of them is abusing prescription or OTC drugs. If you have five parents of teenagers, the problems may be going on right under their noses. The parents (or their children) may be "misplacing" medications, and the parents might not even realize what is happening.

Our society has embraced drug therapy for too long. As consumers, we are reaping what we have allowed the drug companies to sow. We are qualified to speak out against this trend in our youth. We only have to open our mouths and our hearts.

Providing this information is another way of introducing health awareness to the people in my community. As part of my Community Relations Program,

which includes corporate seminars, health screenings, and these newspaper articles, I have seen first hand how awareness and education can yield real action and results. Teaching middle school children in my Trim Kids Program, I see how proper education and direction can make a real difference. Our own actions could result in the saving of a life (or many lives). Your efforts could prevent a young person from overdosing on a drug they thought was safe just because someone else in the family took it for a medical condition.

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