

Factors contributing to increased nonmedical prescription drugs use

UNODC Experts Meeting:
The nonmedical use of prescription drugs: policy direction issues

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Who is at risk and why?



Objectives for this session

- Which are the social factors contributing to an increased nonmedical prescription drugs use? (Short-cuts?)
- Which factors make women and young and elderly people risk populations?
- Are health care professionals also a risk population?
- Does the mentality/education of physicians have influence in the increase of nonmedical prescription drugs use?
- What is the role of online pharmacies?
- Are new populations using prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes or are they switching from the use of illicit drugs?
- What are the risk and protective factors?

Monitoring misuse of medicinal products in Europe



European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

- EMCDDA already collecting data on misuse and health consequences related to misuse of medicinal products through its GPS, ESPAD, TDI and DRD key epidemiological indicators
- Ongoing cooperation with the EMA for the exchange of data available through the Reitox early warning system (EWS) and the EU pharmacovigilance system
- Need to explore new data sources and conceptualise clear methodological framework (2010WP) since misuse of medicinal products especially when used in combination with illicit drugs is a phenomenon of growing importance

Monitoring misuse of medicinal products in Europe



European Monitoring Centre
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

- In 2010/2011, the EMCDDA will look at
 - Results from GPS and school surveys in Europe (benzos included) plus other data already available and collected by the EMCDDA
 - The assessment of implementation of routine data collection of these data
 - Online prescription regulation in MS
 - Internet snapshot of online pharmacies in Europe
 - Literature review on online availability and use of medicinal products (online pharmacies)
- Contract a study aiming at identifying the first elements on which the monitoring of misuse of medicinal products in Europe could rely on

Some „distinct“ groups...

- (1) Chronic pain patients
- (2) Older adults, elderly
- (3) Adolescents, young adults
- (4) Street drug users, other SUD
- (5) Mentally ill individuals
- (6) Health care professionals



(1) Chronic pain patients

- When a patient is in physical or emotional pain, **prescribing** controlled substances (Rx drugs) often appears to be the **simplest and most efficient way** to relieve suffering and distress
- However, in a minority of cases, this approach leads to Rx drug **abuse** and **patient harm**
- **87%** report **at least one indicator of medication misuse** in the prior year
- Predictor **LT** diagnosis of **SUD: Increased likelihood** to report borrowing pain medication from others and requesting an early refill of pain medication
- Group potentially at risk for addiction is significant

Cowan et al., 2003
Fishbain et al., 1992
Isaacson et al. 2005
Morasco & Dobscha, 2008

(2) Older adults, elderly

- Few comparable data on drug abuse in this population
 - App. **25% of all Rx drugs** are **sold to elderly** (mainly against chronic pain, insomnia and anxiety disorders)
 - Estimate: Up to 11% of older women misuse Rx drugs
 - In Germany, **80%** of prescriptions for benzodiazepines and in England **80%** of prescriptions for hypnotics are for people **60+**
 - However, inappropriate medication itself does not seem to be the major cause of adverse drug reactions in the elderly but the inappro-priate use of drugs
- Main preventable factor is the reduction in the number of drugs given

(3) Adolescents, young adults

- **9.1%** of teens (aged 12-17 years) **misused Rx drugs** in 2005 and Rx drugs are the most commonly abused drugs for 12-13 year-olds
 - **As many** new abusers of Rx drugs **as new users of marijuana** in 2006
 - Significant increases from 2000-2004, while use of all other drugs decreased
- **„Generation Rx“** (Partnership for a Drug-Free America 2005)

(3) Adolescents, young adults

Predictors of misuse, risk factors

- **Poorer academic performance**
- **Past year MDD**
- **Past year misuse of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine or inhalant use or non-medical use of Rx drug(s)**
- **Girls have higher dependence and abuse rates of Rx drugs across all drug classes**
- **Misuse of Rx drugs is particularly problematic for adolescents** (uncertain implications for future addiction)

(3) Adolescents, young adults

Motives and conceptions

- **Subtypes** should be considered when examining non-medical prescription drug misuse (recreational vs. self-treatment, mixed)
- Research from MTF suggests that **calming prescription** drugs are becoming more popular, whereas stimulants are becoming more less popular – Desire to feel at peace?
- **Misconceptions** on the relative safety of Rx drugs (PATS):
 - One-third of teens believe there is „**nothing wrong**“ with using Rx medications for non-medical purposes occasionally
 - 40% of teens agree that Rx drugs are ***much safer to use*** than illegal drugs, even without a prescription
 - Close to one-third of teenagers say that Rx painkillers are „**not addictive**“
- Teens choose to misuse a Rx drug to **obtain a specific pharmacological purpose**

(4) Street drug users, other SUD

- Prescription opioids are an **important component** of street drug users' **drug-taking regimes**
- Diverted drugs users resemble those traditionally associated with the **abuse of street drugs**
- (Illicit) drug use (alcohol, cocaine, cannabis, hallucinogen, non-medical stimulant and sedative/tranquilizer use **associated with non-medical use** of Rx opioids use
- Use of other illicit drugs is the **strongest predictor** of non-medical use of Rx opioids

(4) Street drug users

Potential public health benefits?

- Hypothesis: Increase of Rx opioids among street drug users may offer potential public health benefits on several fronts
 - Recent data suggests that primary Rx opioids users appear to exhibit distinctly **lower prevalence of key risk behaviours**
 - Distinct **constitution of the non-medically used Rx opioids** substances themselves (street drugs: unknown, often widely varying potency and purity)
 - **Distinct drug acquisition** activities
- Related and relevant historical example: Off-label and illegal prescription of codeine tablets to thousands of heroin addicts as a health measure in Germany in the 1980s, prior to the widespread availability of MMT

(5) Mentally ill individuals

- Higher rates of opioid abuse problems among users of prescribed opioids at least partially mediated by **depression** and **anxiety disorders**
- ↳ *Hypothesis*: Mental disorders leading to substance abuse among prescription opioid users rather than prescription opioids themselves prompting substance abuse iatrogenically
- SUD due to Rx drug use frequently associated with other axis I/II disorders

(6) Health Care Professionals

- Physicians are as likely to experience drug and alcohol addiction as anyone in the general population
- Physicians are more likely to abuse prescription medications
- Practice of self-treatment with controlled drugs is a 'unique concern' for doctors.
- Multiple factors: Anxiety, depression, personality problems, stress at work, family stress, bereavement, injury or accidents at work, pain and a non-specific drift into drinking have been implicated.
- Early diagnosis is critical because doctors are often reluctant to seek help and colleagues reluctant to intervene.
- Interventions may be difficult to implement

Over-the-counter medication (OTC)

- OTC substances are the predominantly overlooked type of substance abuse by adolescents and young adults
- Phenomenon of legal party pills (piperazine-containing – BZP, mCPP)
- OTC medication plays a considerable role in deliberate self-poisoning

Reasons and other issues...

- **OTC** medication plays a considerable role in deliberate self-poisoning and are the predominantly overlooked type of substance abuse by adolescents and young adults (party pills)
- **Growing availability?** Marked increases in the numbers of prescriptions written for opioids in the USA
- **Internet?** The emergence of „*no prescription web sites*“ introduces a new vector for unregulated access to opioids – However, no parallel increases in problems associated with other Rx drugs
- **Societal norm** that Rx drugs are ubiquitous and universally beneficial - misuse of Rx drug to obtain a specific pharmacological purpose
- Emphasis on **primary care physicians** for care of patients with pain conditions rather than physicians who specialize in pain treatment

Challenges...

- Different group(s) (age, gender, background) – how to access, distinguish and monitor these?
- E.g. specialised treatment centres for drug/substance users only reach parts of the total Rx drugs using population; partly „very“ hidden populations, difficult to access and to get in contact with
- Frequently, misuse of pharmaceuticals remains undiscovered or is regarded as less problematic even among clients with SUD (implicit hierarchy of substances)

MCHUMOR.com by T. McCracken



"I can tell this prescription is a phony.
The doctor's signature is legible."

Thank you very much!