MCLB ALBANY SAFETYGRAM

Painkillers at Root of Prescription Drug Overdose Epidemic

Every day, 52 people die from opioid pain medications. Every year, 47,000 die from a drug overdose, mostly from prescription pain medications.

Opioids are being overprescribed. And it is not children reaching in medicine cabinets who have made drug poisoning the #1 cause of unintentional death in the United States. Adults have been prescribed opioids by doctors and subsequently become addicted or move from pills to heroin.

Perhaps even more alarming: 70% of people who have abused prescription painkillers reported getting them from friends or relatives. Most people don't know that sharing opioids is a felony.

Where do Opioids Come From and What is the Cost?

- Like heroin, opioid painkillers come from the poppy plant; opioids contain morphine and codeine
- In 2010, more than 400,000 emergency room visits were made related to prescription painkillers
- In 2006, the estimated total cost in the United States of nonmedical use of prescription opioids was $53.4 billion, of which $42 billion (79%) was attributable to lost productivity
- Four out of five new heroin users started by misusing prescription painkillers
- Research indicates 4% to 6% of prescription painkiller abusers will transition to heroin use

'Painkillers Don't Kill Pain; They Kill People'

People who take opioid painkillers for too long and in doses too large are more at risk of addiction and more likely to die of drug poisoning. The numbers are staggering. In a 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health report, the Substance Abuse and Medical Health Services Administration says there are 4.3 million current nonmedical users of painkillers. Nearly 2 million people have painkiller substance use disorders. People think taking opioids is the best way to treat pain. But the reality is other non-addictive medicines are just as effective, including many over-the-counter drugs such as ibuprofen or naproxen.

Learn How to Help Keep Loved Ones Alive

- Research indicates people who take opioid painkillers quickly can develop a tolerance to and dependence on this class of drug; learn how they work and why they can be risky
- Talk to children about taking drugs that weren't prescribed
- Learn how to get rid of painkillers properly and what constitutes a safe storage site
- Find out how much good can come from a coordinated effort
- Learn what legal measures are being taken to address drug overdose
- Learn why ibuprofen and acetaminophen when taken together form one of the strongest oral treatments for pain and how opioids delay recovery from injury or surgery
- In 2011, more than 25% of workers compensation prescription drug claim costs were for opioids; learn why spending on opioids does not guarantee better outcomes

Click on each of the **BLUE** statements above for more information on Prescription Drug Overdose.

Risk Management 639-5249
Prepared by: Cathy Brannon

May 2016