



Important Information for School Nurses: Non-Medical Use of Prescription Drugs by Young People

Non-medical use of prescription drugs among young people has become an increasing problem in the United States. According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 20.2% of high school students have taken prescription drugs without a doctor’s prescription.¹ Similarly, the 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) revealed that 20% of high school students, or 3.2 million young people, reported abusing a prescription medication at least once in their lives.²

Prescription drug misuse occurs in all social, economic, geographic and cultural groups. Children, as young as 12, are using prescription drugs to get high. Prescription drugs are easier to access because they can be taken from their home’s medicine cabinet and young people may believe they are safer than illicit drugs because they are manufactured by a pharmaceutical company.

What You Can Do

As a school nurse, you can play an important role in preventing young people’s non-medical use of prescription drugs.

1. Increase your knowledge regarding prescription drugs and their use by young people. The four (4) types of prescription drugs that are most commonly used for non-medical purposes are:

Prescription Drug	Common Prescription Use	Examples
Opioids/Narcotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morphine • Codeine • Oxycodone (Oxycontin) • Hydrocodone (Vicodin) • Meperidine (Demerol) • Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
Depressants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Sleep disorders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pentobarbital sodium (Nembutal) • Diazepam (Valium) • Alprazolam (Xanax) • Zolpidem (Ambien)
Stimulants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methylphenidate (Ritalin) • Dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine)
Steroids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hormone deficiency • Breast cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testosterone • Stanzolol (Winstrol)

Additional information regarding prescription medication misuse can be found on the New York State Department of Health’s (NYSDOH) web site at: <http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/patients/medicines/prescription/> and at the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) web site at: <http://www.oasas.ny.gov/AdMed/rx/rxbuse.cfm>

2. Increase communication inside and outside of your school regarding the dangers of prescription drug misuse. Last year, the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) announced two major initiatives:
- **“Smart Moves, Smart Choices: A Prescription Drug Abuse Education Program”** features free videos to educate youth and parents. The program also includes a school assembly tool kit to help your school host student and/or parent assemblies.
 - **“The Current State of Teenage Drug Abuse: Trend Toward Prescription Drugs”** is a 2.0 CNE program that is available online. A toolkit provides school nurses with educational resources and tools for preventing, identifying and managing young people’s misuse of prescription drugs.

Both of the above resources can be found on the NASN web site at:

<http://www.nasn.org/Default.aspx?tabid=506>

3. Provide resources to your students, their parents and your fellow educators regarding non-medical use of prescription drugs. The following are some of the available resources from the NYSDOH and OASAS:

For Students

- “Anabolic Steroids and Sports: Winning at Any Cost”
<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1210/1210.pdf>
- “Sharing Prescription Drugs is Dangerous and Dumb!” (Poster)
<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1060.pdf>

For Parents

- “Misuse of Prescription Drugs Climbing in Middle and High School Students – Vital Questions and Answers for Parents”
<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1064.pdf>
- “Protect Your Kids! Prescription Drug Alert: Prescriptions Used as Dangerous New Party Drugs”
<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1021.pdf>
- “Medicine Cabinet Inventory”
<http://www.oasas.ny.gov/AdMed/documents/MedCabSheet.pdf>

For Educators

- “Attention Educators! Prescription Drug Abuse Alert”
<http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1019.pdf>

In addition, OASAS operates a variety of settings including 2,000 school-based locations statewide. Their providers offer classroom presentations, skills development workshops, training sessions for parents and teachers and positive alternative activities for youth. For more information, please email the OASAS Bureau of Prevention at: Prevention@oasas.ny.gov

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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2009. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. June 4, 2010, Vol. 59, No. SS-5. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5905.pdf>
 2. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America. 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS). “Cause for Concern: National Study Shows Reverse in Decade-Long Declines in Teen Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol”. Available at: http://www.drugfree.org/Portal/DrugIssue/Research/Teen_Study_2009/National_Study