

DEA's Deadly Decision

Newswire Services

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As Prescription Drug Deaths Increase – DEA Reduces Restrictions on Schedule II Drugs.

In December 2007, the DEA announced physicians are now allowed to write a prescription for a 90-day supply of schedule II drugs. Schedule II drugs are controlled and classified as legal narcotic and stimulant drugs with high potential for dependence and abuse, but still having therapeutic value. Other drugs in this category include Cocaine, Methadone, Oxycontin, Morphine, Ritalin, and Fentanyl.

In the wake of a prescription drug death epidemic in this country, the DEA has reversed the 30 day rule which was initially put in place to reduce the abuse of schedule II drugs. According to the CDC, the number of unintentional poisoning deaths increased from 12,186 in 1999 to 20,950 in 2004. The largest increases for prescription drug deaths were in the "other and unspecified" drug, psychotherapeutic drug, and "narcotic and hallucinogen" drug categories. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has stated that non-medical use or abuse of prescription drugs is a serious and growing public health problem in this country...an estimated 48 million people (ages 12 and older) have used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons in their lifetimes.

Methadone, a schedule II narcotic drug contributed to 3,849 poisoning deaths in 2004, and other opioid (prescription) drugs attributed to 5,242 poisoning deaths. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) correlates the rise of Methadone related deaths to the increase of Methadone being used in the treatment of chronic pain; although there are no statistics to substantiate this at this time. Current statistics show that prescription drug deaths are killing more Americans than the illicit drugs. For the first time poisoning deaths have surpassed fire arm deaths and are second to motor vehicle deaths. Many of these deaths are caused by patients selling or giving their medications to others, as well as medical errors on the part of the physician.

The DEA made this change as a result of lobbying groups, patients, and specifically mothers whose children are being treated with stimulant drugs for ADD/ADHD. What these mothers are not told and according to the DEA, childhood use of mind-altering drugs is a foremost contributing factor to later cocaine dependence and addiction. Perhaps if these mothers were aware of the easy access to these drugs and the implications this might have on our society, they would feel differently. The CDC reports among all age groups, the largest increase of prescription drug abuse occurred among persons aged 15--24 years (113.3%). Unfortunately, the push from big business and thoughts of convenience will undoubtedly result in more harm from ill-effects of these readily prescribed Schedule II medications, addiction and even death for young and old alike.

Marti Hottenstein, HARMD Inc. (Helping America Reduce Methadone Deaths) Diversion Specialist asks "Why is the DEA allowing more drugs on the street before fixing the problem of prescription drug diversion, dependency and death. What is the DEA's plan to prevent increased diversion and death as a result of this deadly decision?"

Methadone and opioid drugs are killing our children and loved ones. James Pethel III (23), only child of Mary Haynes (HARMD Vice President) died from "acute methadone toxicity." Mary recounts how Jamie was placed on many drugs as a child for ADHD." I listened to professionals, going against my gut feeling and my son still

died in the end, from someone else's prescription." Now Mary joins thousands of other families throughout the United States fighting for tougher prescription drug laws.

Jessica Gerdes, (HARMD Treasurer) asks "How many more of our loved ones have to die as a consequence of ignorance and the deficient management of narcotic drugs before modifications are made to protect and preserve life? Where is the culpability?" Her ex-husband, Colin Gerdes, went to the hospital trusting and seeking treatment, and the medications that were prescribed to help him, killed him. There was no misuse or abuse...no intentional overdose...only a compliant patient following his doctor's prescribing instructions. He died in his sleep approximately 6 hours after taking his doses of Methadone and Valium, exactly as they were prescribed. His parents had to watch their "baby" being carried out of their home encased in a zippered body bag. He was 33 years old.

Another HARMD member who wishes to remain anonymous due to an ongoing investigation lost her daughter to Methadone prescribed by her Primary Care Physician for alleged Narcotic Withdrawal (from Percocets for back pain). This member states "according to FDA Rules and Regulations this was illegal for him to do. My daughter died three years ago on what would have been her eighth day of treatment. I am still waiting for justice, for the doctor to answer to his crime; a justice that I don't think will ever come. Why put these rules and regulations in place if there not going to be upheld? Why is it OK for someone such as a physician to commit murder with prescription drugs, I just don't understand it."

See the petition at <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/DEADeadlyDecision>