

Prescription drug abuse on the rise among suburban women

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WARREN COUNTY - Football star Brett Favre, actors Matthew Perry and Melanie Griffith are just a few of the celebrities who've gotten hooked on the prescription pain drug hydrocodone, better known as vicodin. It's not just a problem for the rich and famous. Hydrocodone is fast becoming one of the most widely abused drugs not in the inner city but in the suburbs.

With 4 children between them, it's rare Jaime Myers and her fiancé Kirk Anderson get quiet time together. They need it to work out details of their upcoming wedding. It's a life Jaime wasn't sure she'd ever enjoy after her addiction to the pain killer, hydrocodone spiraled out of control.

"If I had access to them I was taking up to 30-50 a day to the point where I should have been dead," said Jaime.

It started innocently in 2005. Jaime's doctors prescribed hydrocodone, an opioid, after a series of health problems and surgeries. Unwittingly she became addicted.

"Because they are so easy to get hooked on. It's like an instant happy pill," said Jaime.

Addiction specialist, Dr. Beth Boyarsky says 80% of her patients are addicted to that class of drugs.

"Patients don't understand that the more opioids they take not for pain, the harder it is for them to eventually get off that medicine," said Dr. Boyarsky of Albany Medical Center.

Jaime didn't realize she was in trouble until she stopped taking the meds.

"And half way through the day I started getting sick. I was feeling like I was going to die. The pain from the withdrawal was worse than labor," she said.

So, she went back on the pills. Her denial of a problem grew with her dependence. Even when confronted by a friend, she found excuses not to go to treatment. 'Who would take care of her kids, help her dad?' 'What about her job?' she told herself.

"Opioids really just make everything better and that's a hard nut to crack when you've got lots of stress in your life," said Dr. Boyarsky.

When Jaime's doctors stopped writing prescriptions for her she turned to the internet, but that was expensive.

"Talking to a friend of mine she knew somebody that was a pharmacist and that sold pain pills," said Jaime.

She relied on that connection for a year. Then her supplier demanded cocaine in exchange for her hydrocodone.

"Because his exact words were 'well we're not gonna hook you up if you don't hook us up'," said Jaime.

Some 4 hours later, through a network of friends, Jaime scored the cocaine, 3 grams for \$200 and drove to the regular meeting place which was a fast food restaurant off Northway exit 23 in Warren County. It was a set up. Her suppliers were already in custody and the cops were waiting.

"It didn't seem like my life. It was like I climbed out of myself and was watching a movie," Jaime said.

It's become a familiar tale: the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency or DEA reports from 1990 to 2000 consumption of hydrocodone jumped 300% and continues to climb. It is beginning to edge out marijuana use. Emergency room visits because of hydrocodone abuse are up 500%. The DEA believes hydrocodone may be the most abused prescription drug in the country. The most likely abusers are women like Jaime who are white and between the ages of 20 and 40.

After her arrest and conviction for possessing cocaine, Jaime spent 4 and a half months in jail. Since then she's completed rehab and is now in studying in college to be a drug counselor.

"My thing is, I want to work with teenagers to get them before they get to this point," she says.

