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## Prescription abuse can cause harm to all those involved

By Kristy Ann Pike

Living Well

As parents, we worry about our teenagers and drugs. We see the results of teen drug use in the media, our neighborhoods and sometimes in our own families. Did you know that a significant source of the drugs teens abuse is our own medicine cabinets?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse - [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov) - 2007 data shows that "Prescription and OTC (over-the-counter) medications were the most commonly abused drugs by high school students after marijuana. They represent 6 of the top 10 illicit drugs reported by 12th-graders."

The most common drugs in this category include pain killers like Vicodin and OxyContin; depressants including tranquilizers and sedatives; stimulants like amphetamines, methamphetamine and Ritalin; and cough medicine.

"A recent Institute for Safe Medical Practice study found that approximately \$120 billion is spent in the U.S. annually for emergency room and hospital costs associated with the misuse of prescription medications," said Suzanne Jones, doctor of pharmacy at Dixie Regional Medical Center. It's not just a problem with the kids. "In a study conducted by the Centers for Disease control, one in four people admitted to sharing a prescription with someone else."

What's the harm in sharing prescriptions? For one thing, it's against the law.

In addition, prescription sharing can be dangerous. What may be safe and effective for one person could be harmful or fatal for someone else. For women of childbearing age, there is also a concern for potential harm to an unborn fetus.

We're not all "twins," Jones said. Body fat, age, gender, liver and kidney functions, genetics and any number of other factors can affect the way our bodies respond to different drugs. Allergies to medications can be fairly common, as can interactions between a prescription and another medication, including herbal supplements and over-the-counter drugs.

In addition, "Many medications have a narrow therapeutic index, meaning there's a short span between the right dose and an overdose," Jones said. Some kinds of medications are especially dangerous, including not only the ones commonly abused, but also heart medications and blood thinners.

Even the borrowing of something as simple as an antibiotic is cause for concern since the patient won't get the proper amount, contributing to lack of drug effectiveness and a growing concern of antibiotic resistance.

If the physical dangers of drug sharing and abuse aren't enough, there can be other ramifications. The most obvious is the risk of addiction and all that goes with it, but there are others.

"I know of someone who borrowed a Valium because they were nervous before a job interview," Jones said. The potential employer did a drug screening which the individual then failed.

In another case, a woman was sued for manslaughter when someone she loaned a prescription painkiller to died of an overdose.

A regular review of the contents of the household medicine cabinet is a good idea. Know what is there, who should be using it and how often and watch for discrepancies. Throw out any outdated medications.

We live in a day when drugs provide almost miraculous remedies for any number of problems. However, it's important to remember that the risks of non-medical drug use and prescription sharing can be devastating - for both teens and adults.

Living Well represents a collaboration between healthcare professionals, The Foundation of Dixie Regional Medical Center - a not-for-profit hospital, and The Spectrum. Contact 251-2108 for more information.

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