

Older adults and overdoses



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prescription drugs turned in to sheriff's office (Bryan Garner)

WEST PALM BEACH, FL -- Experts say that over the last several years, prescription drug overdoses are on the rise. But a number of these cases are happening to adults over 60 and some of them are deadly.

The Hanley Center specializes in drug rehabilitation. But over the last several years, the number of older adults seeking treatment has grown. Dr. Barbara Krantz, the CEO and Medical Director says, while they used to be treating alcohol abuse, nowadays they're finding addictions to prescription drugs are on the rise.

"Better living through better chemistry, type attitude. That's what we're seeing. Look at all the commercials on TV. They're all pharmaceutical commercials," Krantz said.

She says the perception of prescription drugs has become more main-stream and now patients are self-diagnosing.

"They've googled their symptoms and they come in with a sheet saying this is what's wrong with me and this is the drug I need," she said.

They're also over-medicating. As older adults battle chronic pain issues they're prescribed long-acting narcotics such as methadone or oxycontin are drugs that stay in the body longer. Krantz says as they're mixed with other drugs, they can create a deadly cocktail.

Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Michael Bell says, while he can't say whether he's seeing more in one age group or another, they are

seeing more overdoses on prescription drugs than ever.

"We're getting cases, 1, 2 every day," he said.

He says people aren't overdosing on one drug anymore, but a combination.

"They're not taking them as their Dr. directed them to. They're taking them because they want to get high," he said.

Dr. Bell says ironically, the anti-drug campaigns are concentrated on young people but that's not a generation dying from prescription drug overdoses.

The Hanley Center says family members should keep an eye on their older-adults and consult with their doctors on all of the medications they're taking to avoid any lethal combinations.

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