A prescribed addiction

Written by Nate Moore - Argonaut

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Photo Illustration by Jake Barber/Argonaut

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According to the detective, they are seeing an increase in people hospitalized each year in Moscow because of overdosing on OxyContin although no deaths have occurred yet.

“I have been through several OxyContin-related deaths in other locations though, about seven or eight per year,” said the detective.

Elliott Kalin, a freshman at the University of Idaho described the death of his high school friend who overdosed on OxyContin. According to Kalin, Blaine Hopp started taking OxyContin in his junior year of high school. Kalin said Hopp was an energetic guy, but after OxyContin, it seemed like he just stopped caring.

Hopp’s family found him dead after choking on his own vomit, Kalin said. He was downstairs in their home — they thought he was packing to go work for the summer.

“It was pretty tough,” Kalin said. “We were all pretty tight.”

OxyContin is a perscribed narcotic usually issued for chronic pains from illnesses such as cancer and arthritis. But according to physician assistant Bruce Barnhart, more and more doctors are prescribing OxyContin to people with physical injuries.

“People prescribed OxyContin for a fracture may use it for only a week or maybe a month and find that they have become dependent on it,” Barnhart said.

Sharon Fritz, a psychologist at the Counseling and Testing Center said she wants students to know the center is there to give students free and completely confidential counseling.

According to Fritz, addictions can usually be overcome by helping people make necessary lifestyle changes. But sometimes the withdrawal symptoms from narcotic

addictions can be so severe a patient must go under a physician’s care to break the addiction, she said.

“People who take OxyContin aren’t even thinking about the possibility of becoming addicted because they see it as a legal medication,” Fritz said.

According to the Drug Task Force detective, the most common ways for people to obtain OxyContin are by writing fraudulent prescriptions, or by ‘doctor shopping.’ Doctor shopping is when people go to multiple doctors’ offices and collect as many prescriptions as possible by faking an injury or illness.

“Some people have deliberately injured themselves just to get the drug,” the detective said.

The detective said tracking down these doctor shoppers is next to impossible because the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act prevents doctors from disclosing any information about their patients. This makes it difficult for doctors and police alike to recognize doctor shoppers.

When comparing OxyContin to other recreational drugs such as marijuana and cocaine, the detective said while marijuana is more widely abused, OxyContin and cocaine run fairly parallel.

“In some ways, OxyContin is more dangerous than cocaine since it gives people a false sense of safety because it is a prescribed medication,” the detective said.

According to the detective, the most common way recreational drug users abuse OxyContin is by crushing it up, then swallowing or inhaling it through the nose. Some users even inject the drug like they would heroin. Both of these techniques defeat the time-release function of the medicine and cause the drug to enter the system at a much faster rate. These methods can cause someone to overdose with a single pill.

“If you look at its make-up, OxyContin is basically a synthetic heroin,” the detective said.

When a person overdoses on a narcotic like OxyContin, their heart rate and respiration slow dramatically. Their blood pressure drops, and they simply fall asleep. After that if they don’t get medical attention their body can just shut down.

According to the DEA, OxyContin is a schedule II drug, which is defined by the Controlled Substance Act as having a high potential for abuse; currently accepted for medicinal use and may lead to severe psychological or physical dependence.

The punishment for the distribution of OxyContin is a felony. Possessing OxyContin without a prescription is subject to either a misdemeanor or a felony, depending on the quantity.

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