

## **Prescription Drug Abuse**

**By Rosemary Orr, Seattle**

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To the Editor

I commend you for reporting the escalating numbers of deaths from overdose of prescription opiates (Seattle PI July 22). As you note, the deaths have increased markedly in the past 12 years. In the mid nineties, the Government gave a mandate to the health care profession to ask all patients about pain and to treat it better. This resulted in a huge increase in prescriptions for drugs such as Percocet, Vicodin and OxyContin. These medications were often prescribed in large numbers, by well meaning doctors, without a true appreciation of their addictive qualities or the fact that they were often more medicine than was necessary for the pain for which they were being prescribed.

It is not uncommon for teenagers who have undergone wisdom teeth extraction, to be sent home with a supply of Vicodin well beyond that which is necessary for a few days of pain. Post surgical patients are given many more opiate pills than they need when they leave hospital. Young people, who are beginning to abuse drugs, now start with a prescription drug more often than they do marijuana. These prescribed drugs are often obtained from home medicine cabinets.

As a physician, I am aware of the pressures on doctors to respond to requests for adequate treatment of pain. In today's society, we expect instant relief, and doctors have so little time for the full assessment of a patient. So, dangerous medications are frequently prescribed without consideration of the many problems associated with their use or the wide distribution of such deadly medicines. I believe that education for all, and the restrained prescribing of these drugs, is essential to stop this huge increase in overdose deaths and addiction.

My 24 year old son, Robin, died of an overdose 3 years ago. He was addicted to OxyContin. In 2006, I was unaware of the extent of prescription drug abuse, and of the addictive potential of oxycodone especially packaged as OxyContin. I now know many parents in Seattle and the surrounding area, who have lost children to overdoses of prescription drugs. I also correspond with other parents across the country, who have lost children to these deadly drugs. Many of these young people started their use after being prescribed OxyContin or methadone for back pain.

As a society, we have a responsibility to teach our young people about the dangers of these medicines- however they are obtained. They should be told that they are just as dangerous as heroin and that they are not "safe" because they are ordered by doctors. Drugs need not be bought on shady street corners to be dangerous. We must also draw attention to the unthinking prescribing of these drugs, which in the right amounts, for the right reason, are necessary for the control of pain.

Yours sincerely,  
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