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NEWSLETTER



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Prescription Drug Abuse: What Price for Pain Relief?

The overdose death of pop star Michael Jackson in 2009 drew new attention to the abuse of prescription drugs in the United States.

And with that attention has come acknowledgment that it's become a widespread phenomenon.

One of every five teenagers and adults -- about 50 million Americans -- have used prescription drugs for a non-medical purpose at some point in their lives, according to the most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health.¹

What is driving this explosion in opioid usage? Although debatable, one factor may be that pain relief is now considered a given right and that all persons are entitled to adequate pain relief. Secondly, many physicians may now fear sanctions for *under* prescribing of pain killers, a stark contradiction to the past.

It is clear who is responsible for the increased supply of pain medications: any provider who writes for a prescription has the potential to become part of the problem. A recent survey study showed that "pill mills" were only responsible for 3.4% of diverted

drugs, thus the majority of drug diversion occurs from the majority of physician prescribers.²

A recent study by Granger³, et al suggested that patients with a history of misplaced or stolen prescriptions had a 78% probability of being an abuser or diverter of medications and such aberrant behavior should be seriously considered when continuing to prescribe opiates for such individuals.



¹Medline Plus, December 29th, 2009

²Pain Medicine News, March 2009

³Granger WJ, MacDonald D. Reports of stolen prescription medication: a closer look? *Anesthesiology*. 2008; 109:A1555.

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