

Sharing Prescription Drugs Frequent Among U.S. Teens

By: Kerri McCutchin

Prescription drug abuse by teens and young adults has spiraled into a serious issue in the United States. As reported in the Partnership for a Drug Free America's annual tracking study:

- 1 in 5 teens has abused a prescription (Rx) pain medication
- 1 in 5 report abusing prescription stimulants and tranquilizers
- 1 in 10 has abused cough medication [3]

According to a new study, 20% of America's teens exchange and share prescription drugs such as antibiotics and allergy medications with friends, clearly a dangerous and possibly deadly practice. For instance, imagine a teen who has been prescribed Accutane lends a pill or two from their prescription to a friend who is unaware that she is pregnant. Since Accutane is associated with birth defects, this practice could lead to very serious implications for the teen and her unborn child [1].

The study, which appears online in the Journal of Adolescent Health, interviewed 592 English and Spanish speaking adolescents, ages 12 to 17, both black and white. The teens were asked if they had ever "borrowed" or "loaned" a prescription drug and, if so, what kind. The teens were also asked if they ever gave or received any warnings or instructions with the medication. Questions concerning outcomes were also raised, such as did the person taking the drugs visit a doctor anyway? Did side effects or allergic reactions occur [2]? Chris Mayhorn, an associate professor of psychology at North Carolina State University, states in a news release from the Center for the Advancement of Health:

"Other researchers have studied people selling prescription drugs, but we looked at people with good intentions, trying, for instance, to help a friend who lacked money or transportation for a doctor's visit" [1].

According to lead author Richard Goldsworthy, Director for Research and Development at Academic Edge, Inc., and colleagues, the study found that nearly a third of teens who took a "borrowed" prescription did not inform their doctors. This type of situation can lead to unexpected drug interactions [1]. In addition to the risk of unforeseen side effects, prescription drug sharing can lead to a delay in teens addressing serious health care issues. Teens may skip necessary appointments believing they have already dealt with the problem. Moreover, the misuse of shared antibiotics enhances the increasing problem of antibiotic drug resistance [2].

The findings within the study are important "for physicians, prevention coalitions, school counselors, parents and the youth themselves," said Melissa Haddow, co-author of the study and director of the Community Partnership of the Ozarks. She continues by stating, "this work adds to

our knowledge about a growing problem....and highlights the diversity of medications being abused this way, which had not been recognized.”

Sources:

[1]

http://news.yahoo.com/s/hsn/20090810/hl_hsn/sharingprescriptionmedscommonamongsteens

[2] <http://www.news-medical.net/news/20090810/Sharing-prescription-advice-among-adolescents-can-have-dangerous-repercussions.aspx>

[3] http://www.drugfree.org/portal/drugissue/features/prescription_medicine_misuse