

The Student Pharming Culture

Abuse of Prescription/Over the Counter Meds

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America's national survey, released in 2006, includes alarming statistics that confirm today's teen population is intentionally abusing prescription and over-the-counter medications to get high – a trend often called “pharming” (due to the use of pharmaceuticals).

The survey's key findings include the following points of concern:

- Abuse of prescription/over the counter (Rx/OTC) medicines is now so prevalent it is “normalized” among teens.
- Nearly one in five teens report abusing prescription medications to get high; and, one in 10 report abusing cough medicine to get high.
- Far too many teens have a false sense of security about the abuse of Rx/OTC medicines:
- Two in five teens agree that Rx medicines, even if they are not prescribed by a doctor, are much safer to use than illegal drugs.
- Nearly one-third of teens believe there's “nothing wrong” with using Rx medicines without a prescription “once in a while.”
- Nearly three out of 10 teens believe prescription pain relievers—even if not prescribed by a doctor—are not addictive.
- More than half of teens don't agree strongly that using cough medicines to get high is risky.
- With the majority of teens agreeing that Rx medicines are easier to get than illegal drugs, teens see these substances as readily available highs.

How are students getting these drugs so readily?

Unfortunately, students don't have to look—or work—very hard to get these drugs. In addition to doling out medications among their peers, they are turning to the Internet.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University released a report in 2006 indicating that 185 websites had recently been found selling prescription drugs—and many of them don't require a prescription!

Of those that do require a prescription, many accept faxed copies, a practice which, according to Join Together Online (July 14, 2006), opens the process to forgery and illegally using the same script multiple times.

And 30% of the sites that don't require a prescription boast about that fact, according to CASA. “Online consultations” are offered by 60% and the other 10% don't mention anything about prescriptions.



Tips for Parents

As students turn to “pharming” more and more, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America has put together a guide for parents: “Getting high on prescription and over-the-counter drugs is dangerous: A guide to keeping your teenager safe in a changing world” (www.drugfree.org/Files/rx_guide). Some of the tips they offer include:

- Consider your own drug behavior and the messages you are sending.
- Reach out to have a discussion. As the guide says, “Research shows that kids who learn a lot about drug risks from their parents are up to half as likely to use drugs as kids who haven't had that conversation with Mom and Dad.”
- Do a drug inventory. Forgotten/expired prescriptions or leftover OTC meds could be appealing to kids, so get rid of them. Put new drugs away.
- Look on the computer. Try conducting your own web search to see how easily one can buy prescription meds without a prescription.
- Watch for warning signs. These may include unexplained disappearance of meds from medicine cabinets, declining grades, loss of interest in activities, changes in friends and behaviors, disrupted eating or sleeping patterns, and more.

Sources: *The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University News Release, June 19, 2006, www.casacolumbia.org; Join Together Online, July 14, 2006, www.jointogether.org; www.drugfree.org/Portal/DrugIssue/Research/Teens_2005/Key_Findings_on_Teen_Drug_Abuse*

Most Commonly Abused Rx/OTC Meds

The term “pharming” refers to the use of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medications for recreational use. Students get “high” by abusing these drugs.

Some of the most commonly abused Rx/OTC medications among college students are: Adderall, Ambien, Cough and cold medicine, and other antihistamines, Librium, OxyContin, Ritalin, Valium, Vicodin and Xanax