

## SAMPLE Opinion Editorial on Rx Drug Abuse

When you think about substance abuse, most likely you think about the abuse of alcohol and illicit street drugs like cocaine, marijuana and heroin. But there is another form of drug abuse that poses a real danger to our loved ones. The abuse of prescription medications is quickly becoming a serious public health problem. Here are some sobering facts.

Every day, more than 2,500 teenagers abuse prescription medication for the first time<sup>1</sup>. Surveys conducted by the federal government show that 12 to 17 year olds abuse prescription drugs more than they abuse ecstasy, crack/cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined. Prescription drug abuse by teens is exceeded only by marijuana use.<sup>2</sup> Sixty percent (60%) of teens who have abused prescription painkillers did so before age 15.

The prescription drugs most commonly abused by teens are painkillers, prescribed to treat pain; depressants, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and stimulants, mainly prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).<sup>3</sup> *Sadly*, teens often experiment with medications they find right at home. More than half of teens report that they obtained the medications they abused from a friend, family member or a medicine cabinet.

Many young people think that it is safer to misuse prescription medications than illegal street drugs. But that simply is not true. The misuse of these medications can lead to addiction, overdose and even death. And parents often are unaware that young people are abusing prescription and over-the-counter medications. Even when they do know, they don't know how to talk to their children about the dangers.

Fortunately, there are steps we can take to help protect our children. The first place to begin is right at home. Keep track of medications in your home and make sure they are monitored. Encourage friends and relatives to safeguard medications in their homes. And you should also consult a pharmacist about how to properly dispose of medications that are no longer needed.

It very important to remember that prescription medications have a legitimate medical purpose and can be very beneficial when used properly under the doctor's supervision. Unfortunately, the illegal trafficking and abuse of prescription medications can interfere with the care of people suffering from debilitating pain from serious illness and injury by making it difficult for them to get the medications they need. We need to make sure that people who are under a doctor's care continue to get the treatment they deserve. It is time for officials at the federal, state and local level to call attention to this problem and help parents and families curb the abuse of prescription medications.

<sup>1</sup> Partnership for a Drug Free America/ ONDCP, "Teens and Prescription Drugs", Feb., 2007

<sup>2</sup> National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, Prescription for Danger, Jan. 2008

As part of national [Recovery Month in September/National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month in October], I will be working with city officials and community leaders to raise awareness of the dangers of prescription drug abuse and educate people on what they can do to help combat this emerging problem. We have released a public service announcement and will be holding educational programs and meetings throughout the month to address this issue.

I invite the citizens of [city/town] to join us in the fight against prescription drug abuse. And I encourage everyone to educate themselves about how to safely store and properly dispose of medications in the home. Visit [www.safeguardmy meds.org](http://www.safeguardmy meds.org) for more information.

Remember, prescription drug abuse is still drug abuse. If you don't want your children to abuse prescription medications, don't give them the opportunity.

<sup>1</sup> Partnership for a Drug Free America/ ONDCP, "Teens and Prescription Drugs", Feb., 2007

<sup>2</sup> National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy, Prescription for Danger, Jan. 2008