InterACT & Generation Rx: Using theatre to promote awareness about the abuse of prescription drugs

Americans are using prescription drugs at unprecedented rates. In 2008, Americans purchased approximately 3.9 billion prescription medications\(^1\). Unfortunately, we are becoming a growing culture that self-diagnoses and self-prescribes, expecting quick fixes to any health-related problem. These attitudes underlie a phrase that is being used to describe us at every age, in America’s drug-taking society, — “Generation Rx.”

In 2009, approximately 7 million Americans (age 12 or older) abused a prescription medication\(^2\). However, the average age for starting the abuse of these medications remains 19-22 years\(^2\), representing the average college student. This theatrical performance and accompanying discussion explores possible reasons underlying these statistics, as well as addresses many of the issues faced by our youth, college students and society as a result of prescription drug abuse.

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**ACT 1: What is Prescription Drug Abuse?**

What behaviors classify as prescription drug abuse?

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Why would college students abuse prescription drugs?

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Would you consider the abuse of prescription medications to be a safe alternative to using illicit street drugs?

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ACT 2: Is prescription drug abuse a big deal?

Terrence was written a legitimate prescription for Vicodin. Did Terrence abuse Vicodin?

Would you try to convince Terrence to “never take a pill that he isn’t supposed to take”? If yes, how?

Did You Know?

- It is against federal laws to obtain prescription medications that are not prescribed for you.

- Mixing drugs or taking drugs with alcohol can have severe, even deadly, consequences.

- Approximately one-fourth of drug-related emergency department admissions are due to the abuse or of prescription or over-the-counter medications.

- Pain Relieving, Stimulant, and Depressant prescription medications are just as addicting as illicit street drugs. Take a look at these two chemical structures:

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\begin{align*}
\text{OxyContin} & \quad & \text{Heroin} \\
\end{align*}
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They are more similar than you might think!
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**ACT 3: Is abusing prescription drugs really that dangerous?**
Do you think Steven abused Adderall or other prescription medications?

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What consequences did Steven experience as a result of abusing prescription drugs? Why do you think Steven did not stop abusing prescription drugs despite these consequences?
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**ACT 4: Is prescription drug abuse and addiction a choice?**
Do you agree or disagree with Mike that drug abuse and addiction remains a choice?
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What is your perception of a prescription drug abuser and/or addict?
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**Facts about Addiction:**
- Addiction is a disease of the brain, with risk often determined by the user’s environment, genetics, and behavior.

- Addicting drugs activate a specific pathway in our brain, the “reward pathway”, which produces feelings of reward and pleasure.

- Over time, activation of the “reward pathway” changes the chemistry of our brain. These changes drive the abuser to compulsively use the drug despite negative consequences, causing reward and pleasure to no longer serve as the reason for their drug-seeking behavior.
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ACT 5: What do you think?

Has this performance or discussion altered whether you consider the abuse of prescription medications to be a safe alternative to using illicit street drugs?

What questions would you ask each character? How do you think those characters would respond?

4 Take-Home Messages:

- In terms of abuse, prescription medications are not safe alternatives to street drugs.
- Addiction can occur just as easily with prescription medications as it does with street drugs.
- Possessing a prescription medication without a written prescription is a felony offense and punishable by jail time.
- Take an active role in your medical care—take the prescription as written and never share your medications.

www.pharmacy.ohio-state.edu/outreach/generation-rx
