

Prescription Drug Abuse

How addictive are prescription drugs?

It turns out that prescription drugs can be very addictive if not taken as prescribed to treat a medical condition. This is particularly true of some classes, like opiate analgesics (e.g., Vicodin for the treatment of chronic pain); stimulants (e.g., Ritalin, used to treat attention deficit disorders); and depressants (e.g. Xanax, used to treat anxiety or sleep problems). Long-term prescribed use of these medications or their abuse to get high can lead to physical dependence and in some people, addiction. These are not the same thing--physical dependence occurs because the body gets used to the effects of a drug and reacts if the drug is suddenly stopped or even reduced--withdrawal symptoms result, and these vary according to the drug being used. This can occur even in someone who is taking a drug as prescribed, and is one of the reasons why it is so important that prescription drugs be taken under the close supervision of a physician, who can monitor for any signs of potential problems and take proper action to minimize or avoid them. Addiction on the other hand is the compulsive, often uncontrollable use of drugs in spite of the negative consequences, which may or may not accompany physical dependence.

For more information, specifically on prescription drugs, you might want to check out:

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Prescription/Prescription.html>

If OxyContin is so addictive why do doctors prescribe it?

Virtually every medication presents some risk of undesirable side-effects, sometimes even serious ones. One of the constant challenges that doctors face is weighing the potential benefits and risks of any medical treatment they prescribe to their patients. OxyContin is a powerful and long-acting pain reliever, prescribed to help patients with certain types of pain, usually chronic pain or pain caused by cancer. Before prescribing this medication, doctors should know a patient's complete medical history, including what other health problems they currently have, what other medications they take, and whether they have a history of problems with addiction or other mental illnesses. All of these contribute to the risks involved in prescribing a medication, and help a doctor determine what is the best approach for an individual patient. If a patient is prescribed OxyContin (or other pain medications), they should also be monitored for any change in their condition or response to the medication, so that corrective actions can be taken to minimize the risk and avert the development of addiction.