

the Putnam Valley Health Advisory Council presents . . .

# The HAC Helpline #14

for the Students and Families of the Putnam Valley Central School District

## Prescription medication abuse

by teens and young adults is a growing problem 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 pain medication
- \* 1 in 5 report abusing prescription stimulants and tranquilizers
- \* 1 in 10 has abused cough medication

Many teens think these drugs are safe because they have legitimate uses, but taking them without a prescription to get high or "self-medicate" can be as dangerous – and addictive – as using street narcotics and other illicit drugs.

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America is making sure that parents, young adults and teens know the very real risks of misusing medicine. Our educational materials and messages work. More teens and parents need to see and hear them. Help us reach more families with life-saving information.

### PARENTS' QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

#### Q: What age are teens abusing prescription medications?

A: Kids as young as 12 are trying or using prescription medications non-medically -- to get high or for "self-medicating." Pharmaceuticals are often more available to 12 year olds than illicit drugs because they can be taken from the medicine cabinet at home, rather than marijuana which necessitates knowing someone who uses or sells the drug. Also, pills may have a perception of safety because they are easier to take than smoking pot or drinking alcohol and are professionally manufactured in a lab.

#### Q: What types of prescription medications are teens abusing?

A: The National Survey on Drug Use and Health identifies 4 types of prescription medications that are commonly abused — pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives and tranquilizers. Eleven percent of teens (aged 12-17) reported lifetime non-medical use of pain relievers and four percent reported lifetime non-medical use of stimulants.

#### Q: Do different groups abuse different types of medications?

A: Yes. Painkillers are the most common pharmaceutical abused by

teens, especially by younger teens. Stimulant abuse is more common among older teens and college students than younger teens. Girls are more likely to be current (past month) abusers of prescription medications than boys (4.3 vs. 3.6 percent). [Source: 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. ]

**Q: What can I do to help to prevent my child from misusing prescription medications?** A: One easy way to prevent is to keep all prescription medication hidden: Parents and family members whose homes teens visit should keep prescription medications out of teens reach, rather than in the medicine cabinet. You should also talk to your teen and warn them that taking prescription medications without a doctor's supervision can be just as dangerous and as potentially lethal as taking illicit drugs. For example, pain killers are made from opioids, the same substance as in heroin.

**Q: How can I talk to my kids about pharmaceutical medication abuse?** A: Starting a conversation about drugs with your kids is never easy — but it's also not as difficult as you may think. Take advantage of everyday "teachable moments" and, in no time at all, you'll have developed an ongoing dialogue with your child. Teachable moments refer to using every day events in your life to point out things you'd like your child you'd like to know about. When you talk to your kids about drugs make a special point to tell kids how dangerous prescription medication abuse is.

### WHAT TO TELL YOUR CHILD ABOUT PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

- ° Pharmaceuticals taken without a prescription or a doctor's supervision can be just as dangerous as taking illicit drugs or alcohol.
- ° Abusing painkillers is like abusing heroin because their ingredients (both are opioids) are very similar.
- ° Prescription medications are powerful substances. While sick people taking medication under a doctor's care can benefit enormously, prescription medication can have a very different impact on a well person.
- ° Many pills look pretty much the same, but depending on the drug and the dosage the effects can vary greatly from mild to lethal. Prescription medications, as all drugs, can cause dangerous interactions with other drugs or chemicals in the body.
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[Source: [http://www.drugfree.org/Parent/Resources/Prescription\\_Medicine\\_Misuse](http://www.drugfree.org/Parent/Resources/Prescription_Medicine_Misuse)]

### About the PV Health Advisory Council

For more than 15 years, The Putnam Valley Health Advisory Council has been quietly taking responsibility for improving the health, safety, and well being of the children of the Putnam Valley Central School District, as well as the community at large. This group of teachers, parents, physicians, nurses, law enforcement, administrators and students meets monthly throughout the school year and the summer and sponsors community events and programs aimed at educating and informing the children and parents of Putnam Valley.