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Factsheet 4

Use of internationally controlled medicines

Prescription drug abuse

Prescription drug abuse is a major threat to public health, even outpacing the rates for illegal drugs in some countries

INCB notes that the increased prevalence in prescription drug abuse has, to a large extent, been driven by the widespread availability of those drugs, as well as erroneous perceptions that prescription drugs are less susceptible to abuse than illicit drugs. The problem has been further exacerbated by the non-prescription use of these drugs for self-medication.

One of the main sources of prescription drugs diverted from licit channels for abuse is the presence in households of prescription drugs that are no longer needed or used for medical purposes. Surveys of abuse prevalence undertaken in several countries have revealed that a significant percentage of individuals abusing prescription drugs for the first time obtained the drug from a friend or family member who had acquired them legally.

“Take-back days” initiative

Among the measures used by States to combat this problem are prescription drug disposal initiatives, such as prescription drug “take-back days”. The staging and publicizing of these initiatives result not only in safe disposal of prescription drugs but also increase public awareness of the dangers of prescription drug abuse.

Addressing root causes such as “doctor shopping”

INCB reiterates that any comprehensive strategy aimed at tackling the problem of prescription drug abuse must also address the root causes of the excessive supply of prescription drugs, including overprescribing by medical professionals, “doctor shopping” and inadequate controls on the issuing and filling of prescriptions.

Availability of narcotic drugs for treatment of pain

While global supply meets the global demand, the consumption remains concentrated, in particular in developed countries

The amount of opiate raw material available for the manufacturing of narcotic drugs for pain relief is more than sufficient to meet the current demand level, as data available to the INCB show, and global stocks are increasing.

Global production of opiate raw materials was lower than global demand for those raw materials in the period 2006-2008, while production exceeded demand from 2009 to 2012. Global production of opiate raw materials in 2013 was expected to exceed global demand again, with the result that stocks of those raw materials would further increase in 2013 and in 2014. The supply will remain fully sufficient to cover demand, as reported by Member States.