

Over-consumption of narcotic drugs and prescription drug abuse

1. Inadequate access to opioid analgesics for medical use in some regions is a matter of concern, but it is important also to consider that in regions with high licit consumption, there is a growing public health concern about prescription drug abuse. In some countries abuse of prescription drugs has outpaced rates of abuse of other drugs. In recent years, the increase abuse of prescription drugs has been accompanied by a marked jump in related overdose deaths in countries with a high per capita consumption of opioid analgesics
2. Many factors are contributing to this development, main among these are the widespread availability of those drugs and the erroneous, but widespread, belief that prescription drugs are “safe” and less susceptible to abuse than illicit drugs. The use of opioid analgesics without a prescription and proper medical supervision or for self-medication and in particular excessive prescribing by unscrupulous physicians and irresponsible marketing by some pharmaceutical companies has fuelled and exacerbated the problem.
3. To address this problem, Governments need to develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at tackling 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. In addition, one of the main sources of prescription drugs diverted from licit channels to abuse identified by public health officials 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.
4. Among the measures being increasingly used to address this situation are mechanisms to ensure the safe return and disposal of medications possessing psychoactive properties, particularly those containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, including prescription drug take-back days. The setting-up of such initiatives in many jurisdictions has yielded significant results at a relatively low cost.
5. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) [resolution 56/8](#) calls upon States to consider the adoption of a actions to address prescription drug abuse in cooperation with various stakeholders such as public health officials, pharmacists, pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors, physicians, consumer protection associations and law enforcement agencies, in order to promote greater awareness of the risks associated with the non-medical use of prescription drugs, in particular those containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

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For further information, please contact: INCB Secretariat at Tel: (+43-1) 26060 4163
Email: incb.secretariat@un.org, Website: www.incb.org
