Rx Opioid Misuse/abuse and Consequences

Prevalence

Misuse/Abuse of Prescription (Rx) Opioids (Pain Medications) in the Past Year by Age, 2010-2012

- 1 in 5 started illicit drug use with prescription drugs
- 4 in 5 new heroin users had previously misused Rx opioids

Opioids as a Gateway Drug

Individuals who misused/abused Rx opioids were more likely to use other illicit drugs in their lifetime.

Rx Opioid Sources

Most misuser/abusers obtained their Rx opioids from a friend or relative.

Economic Costs

- Total Annual Charges for All Rx Opioid-related Hospitalizations in LAC
- The economic burden of Rx opioid misuse/abuse is increasing.

Deaths

- Nearly 400 deaths involved Rx opioids each year.
- Most opioid-related deaths also tested positive for multiple substances.

Healthcare Utilization

Rx Opioid-related ED Visits and Hospitalizations in LAC, 2006-2013

- Healthcare utilization among Rx opioid misusers/abusers greatly increased in recent years.

Rx Opioid-related ED Visits increased among whites and African Americans, especially for African American women.

Treatment Admissions

Rate of Rx Opioids as Primary Drug of Choice by Gender and Race/Ethnicity in LAC, 2006-2013

- Treatment admission for Rx opioids increased. Whites accounted for a majority of Rx opioid treatment admissions.

For treatment in LAC, call (888)742-7900 during normal business hours, or call 211.

For more information on medication-assisted treatment (MAT), visit http://www.dpt.samhsa.gov/medications/medsindex.aspx.


For more information regarding this brief, please contact Tina Kim, Ph.D. at tkim@ph.lacounty.gov.
According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health\(^1\), the prevalence rate of misusing/abusing opioids (prescription [Rx] pain medications) in the past year in Los Angeles County (LAC) is 4.8%, which is higher than the national average (4.5%), and lower than the California (CA) state average (4.9%) in 2010-2012.

- Misuse/abuse of Rx opioids in LAC (9.0%), CA (9.9%), and the US (10.3%) is most common among individuals aged 18-25 years.
- LAC has lower rates of Rx opioid misuse/abuse among youths (4.8%) and young adults (9.0%) compared to CA (youths 5.9%, young adults 9.9%) and US (youths 5.9%, young adults 10.3%) averages.

About 1 in 5 (20.6%) individuals aged 12 or older who started using illicit drugs in the past year in the US reported that their first drug was Rx opioids\(^2\).

- Among new heroin users in the US, about 4 in 5 (79.5%) reported misusing/abusing Rx opioids before starting their heroin use\(^3\).
- Compared to those who have never misused/abused Rx opioids, those who misused/abused Rx opioids had a greater risk of using other illicit drugs, including marijuana (2.1 times more likely), cocaine (4.5 times more likely), inhalants (5.6 times more likely), and heroin (9 times more likely) during their lifetimes\(^4\).

Research data, the sum of hospital charges for all hospitalizations with any Rx opioid-related diagnosis or external cause of injury significantly \((P_{trend}<0.01)\) increased by 68% from 2006 ($399 million) to 2013 ($673 million)\(^5\). All costs are adjusted for inflation to 2015 US dollars.

According to underlying cause of death data, premature death (death before age 75) from drug overdoses accounted for 18,204 years of potential life lost in LAC in 2011. On average, individuals who died from drug overdoses died 31 years prematurely\(^6\).

- According to LAC Coroner data, nearly 400 deaths (ranging 360-469) tested positive for Rx opioids at death each year in LAC. Rx opioids are involved in about 60% of all drug-related deaths from 2006-2012 in LAC\(^7\).
- Many drug-related deaths tested positive for multiple substances, indicating that multiple drug use is common in LAC. Almost half of deaths testing positive for Rx opioids also tested positive for alcohol, benzodiazepines, or both substances at death\(^7\).

In LAC, the number of hospitalizations with any Rx opioid-related diagnosis or external cause of injury significantly \((P_{trend}<0.01)\) increased by 30% from 2006 (11,230) to 2013 (14,594)\(^8\).

The number of emergency department (ED) visits with any Rx opioid-related diagnosis or external cause of injury significantly \((P_{trend}<0.01)\) increased by 171% from 2006 (3,354) to 2013 (9,075)\(^9\).

The rate of Rx opioid-related ED visits per 100,000 population increased for white and African Americans, and increased most rapidly among African American women\(^5\).

- Whites had the highest rate of treatment admissions for Rx opioids as the primary drug of choice from 2006-2013, followed by African American females.

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