

To Die... For the High

Prescription Drugs

By: Rebecca Schwartz

The Beatles sing, "I get by with a little help from my friends, I get high with a little help from my friends." These lyrics seem to indicate, that "friends" are either suppliers of drugs or drugs themselves. The media is reporting that actor Matthew Perry, of the TV show "Friends", is having some "friend" problems of his own. In fact, he has admitted to being addicted to the prescription drug, Vicodin. Perry is not the only celebrity who has recently admitted to having a problem with prescription painkillers. Melanie Griffith, Michael Jackson, Anna Nicole Smith, Chevy Chase, and football player, Brett Favre have all had their struggles with addiction. Clearly, these are the high profile cases, but they are not alone. Ordinary people, and teens too, abuse prescription drugs.

"Ritalin, Valium, Oxycontin, and Vicodin, are some of the prescription drugs that young adults misuse," says Dr. Kilmberg from Florida Foundation for Healthcare. Ritalin has become the drug of choice for many students needing to pull "all nighters." Ritalin is given to children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). While this medication serves as a calming agent to children with this particular condition, it has the opposite effect on people without the problem. Students are using Ritalin as a modern version of "speed." While on Ritalin a student may forgo sleep all together, with devastating health consequences. Valium has long been prescribed to those suffering from an anxiety disorder of some kind. When taken under the careful guidance of a medical practitioner, it can be a highly effective medication. It is, however, extremely addictive and easily over-dosed. Therefore, a person taking Valium for recreational purposes can seriously injure their health, and even die. Oxycontin and Vicodin are medications prescribed for people suffering from severe musculoskeletal pain. In its pure form, Oxycontin has similar properties to morphine, a medication given to patients



that suffer from the severe pain associated with cancer and catastrophic injuries. When taken without a doctor's consent, Oxycontin can be overused for the euphoria that it produces. It has recently become the street drug of choice for many young people seeking a quick and powerful high. However, an overdose of Oxycontin can be lethal.

According to a CNN report, Dr. Leshner said that the number of new users of prescription painkillers, without a doctor's approval, has increased 300 percent since the 1980s. "And of the estimated 4 million Americans abusing prescription drugs older adults, adolescents and women are doing so at higher

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rates." Dr. Leshner also said that it's particularly concerning that young adults are abusing the drugs because their brains are still going through developmental changes, and the effects of drug misuse may be more severe.

There are several reports of teens being charged with the selling of Ritalin. Three students in Florida were arrested last June, when they were caught exchanging the drug for money. Two girls, 14 and 15 years old, sold two Ritalin pills to a 15-year-old boy. None of the teens had a prescription for the drug; one girl had stolen the drug from someone who did. National Public Radio reported that the

abuse of prescription drugs is becoming increasingly common for college and high school students across the United States. Students have reported taking these substances for many reasons. Some say they take them to concentrate better on homework or exams, to stay awake during long nights of drinking, or to mix them with other drugs to find a new kind of high. A local college student, who asked to remain anonymous, told me, "I saw my friend crush up 10 pills of Ritalin and snort them. It's rampant here." Jennifer Kairis, a sophomore at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, died in March 1998 after taking a lethal mixture of Inderal, a heart medication sometimes prescribed to control migraines, and two different antidepressants before a fraternity party. According to city police, she did not have a prescription for Inderal.

If you or someone you know is involved in prescription drug misuse, help is available. Talk to an addiction counselor, your school guidance counselor, your family doctor, or a close friend. The following is a list of web sites all focused on assisting with recovery.

<http://www.na.org>

<http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/pillsanonymous>

<http://www.prescriptionanonymous.org>

<http://www.addictionresourceguide.com>

A theme in many drug addiction therapy programs is learning to channel negative energy into positive. When we spend our time on sports or the arts, we are less likely to use prescription drugs recreational purposes. So keep yourself busy.