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ARCHIVE

READER'S VIEW: Teen drug use is downright scary

By *MARK VONNEGUT, M.D., Quincy*

The rise of narcotics addiction among teenagers and young adults is real and scary, and almost entirely due to Oxycontin. The fact that it's a pill, rather than sticking a needle in your arm, makes it too easy, especially after a drink or two, especially if peers and classmates are doing the same thing. The rapidity with which these kids find themselves experiencing addiction and withdrawal rivals heroin.

One of the scary things about this epidemic is that kids who never would have otherwise stuck a needle in their arm discover very quickly that injected heroin is far and away the cheapest way to get over Oxycontin withdrawal. Since it's nearly impossible to get kids into treatment, there are a lot of children who would like to be in treatment who are instead exposed to the risks of needles, crime, violence, exploitation, not to mention not doing so well in school.

The other thing having so many untreated addicts in our schools and neighborhoods does is spread the disease. Untreated addicts are not nice people. Selling Oxy's to the uninitiated are among the milder things they do to feed their habit.

While I would love to believe that responsible parenting will strike a major blow against drug abuse, there's not much in my experience or the scientific literature to support such a belief.

There's lots of evidence that active addicts in the schools and neighborhoods is the key risk factor.

Oxycontin stops being fun very quickly. Most of these kids want treatment. To not have inpatient and outpatient addiction treatment available for any adolescent who needs it is saving the insurance companies a lot of money, but is killing the rest of us.

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