

America Consumes 80 Percent of All Prescription Painkillers Sold Globally

By Ethan A. Huff, Natural News

Many Americans would argue that the U.S. is the greatest nation on Earth, a beacon of freedom and hope for the rest of the world to emulate. But when it comes to mental and physical quality of life here in the States, America appears to rank near the bottom, as evidenced by the nation's massive and growing addiction to pharmaceutical drugs and painkillers.

Though it often isn't talked about, Americans consume most of the pharmaceutical drugs produced **for the entire world**, even though we represent a mere 5 percent of the global population. And when it comes to painkillers, Americans consume a staggering **80 percent of the global supply**, with doctors prescribing more than 259 million scripts for painkillers annually.

These figures suggest that, behind the facade, Americans as a whole suffer from far more pain and disease than much of the rest of the world. Either that, or many Americans have become so depressed and hopeless that the only way they can cope with living is to constantly medicate themselves, a reality that seems to be reflected in the latest data sets.

Prescription drug overdose leading cause of acute preventable death in US

But rampant painkiller abuse is having a much more profound effect on people's health than simply taking away their woes. According to data compiled by CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta, prescription drug overdose is now the leading cause of acute preventable death in America, exceeding even the death rate from car accidents.

Some of the most abused are high-level meds like oxycodone, which comes from a class of drugs known as opioids that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says are responsible for three out of every four drug overdose deaths. In 2010, opioid painkillers killed at least 16,651 people in the U.S., and that number is only continuing to rise year after year.

Prescription painkillers often become gateway to heroin addiction

Most people don't realize this, but opioids like oxycodone (OxyContin) and hydrocodone (Vicodin) are derived from the same plant used to make heroin: the opium poppy. And many of the people who get addicted to these legal opium painkillers end up later switching to heroin, which more often than not is cheaper and easier to access.

As regulators have begun to crack down on the widespread overprescription of opioids, and drug makers reformulate their opioid products to be more tamper-proof, heroin use has consequently increased. The data show that in the two years after OxyContin was reformulated

to be less crushable and soluble in water, abuse of the drug dropped from 35.6 percent to 12.8. But the opposite occurred with heroin use.

"Heroin is usually cheaper than prescription drugs," wrote Dr. Gupta in a recent piece on painkiller deaths. "Opiate pain medications cost the uninsured about \$1 per milligram; so a 60-milligram pill will cost \$60. You can obtain the equivalent amount of heroin for about one-tenth the price."

Legal marijuana leads to massive decline in painkiller deaths

This is part of the reason why Dr. Gupta now supports legalized marijuana, a much safer alternative to opioid painkillers that eases pain without harmful side effects. A recent study published in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that, in the 13 states where medical marijuana is legal, opioid mortality is down at least 25 percent.

"As our awareness of the addiction and overdose risks associated with use of opioid painkillers such as Oxycontin and Vicodin grows, individuals with chronic pain and their medical providers may be opting to treat pain entirely or in part with medical marijuana, in states where this is legal," stated Colleen L. Barry, PhD, senior author of the study from Johns Hopkins University.

Sources for this article include:

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