



Defining Prescription Drug Abuse

What we mean by prescription drug misuse, abuse, addiction and dependence

What is drug abuse or misuse?

Drug abuse or misuse is use that is associated with increased risk for harm, such as:

- Obtaining the drugs from illegitimate sources;
- Deviating from accepted medical practice or scientific knowledge; and
- Taking the drugs for purposes that are not therapeutic.

What is drug addiction?

Drug addiction is a chronic relapsing disorder with genetic and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. It is characterized by one or more of the following behaviours:

- Impaired control over drug use;
- Compulsive drug-seeking behaviour;
- Continued use despite harm; and
- Craving.

Drug addiction can include physical dependence.

What is drug dependence?

Drug dependence results in withdrawal symptoms after a period of continuous use. It may be accompanied by tolerance towards the substance.

What types of prescription medication have the potential for misuse?

Commonly abused prescription medication includes:

- Opioid pain relievers (such as fentanyl, Percodan®, Demerol® and OxyNEO®);
- Stimulants (such as Ritalin®, Concerta®, Adderall® and Dexedrine®); and
- Tranquillizers and sedatives (such as benzodiazepine, Valium®, Ativan® and Xanax®).

References

Health Canada. (2007). *Final consensus document: Abuse of psychoactive pharmaceuticals*. Based on the Workshop to Build Consensus on Concepts and Indicators for Research on Psychoactive Pharmaceutical “Abuse.” Ottawa: Author.

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