

Risk of abuse and diversion of narcotic drugs: prevention measures

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During recent years an epidemic of prescription drugs abuse has characterized North America and other countries. The problem has involved in particular adolescents and young adults with an increased number of overdose and a significant burden for health and security. Among the controlled psychotropic substances used for non-medical purposes synthetic opioids, benzodiazepines and amphetamine type substances are the most prevalent. A variety of studies tried to investigate the possible causes of prescription drug abuse and the characteristic of the people affected, with uncertain findings and controversial evidence. In the same years, 80 percent of the world population is suffering for the lack of these medications to be used for medical purposes. In low income countries, pain medications are not easily available for cancer, surgery and chronic severe pain in general. Financial, legislative, cultural barriers, together of poor qualification of health professionals, are contributing to this condition. Evidence from UNODC have demonstrated that availability of pain medication for medical purposes is not necessarily correlated with abuse and diversion. Appropriate measures should be taken to facilitate access to these indispensable drugs for medical purposes, while adopting all the necessary measures to prevent abuse and misuse. Among them, accurate assessment of the patient, a good individual monitoring, an electronic system of prescription control managed by primary care, a therapeutic alliance with the patient, special measures for the patients with specific vulnerability. Untreated pain affects significantly the quality of life, impairs immune system function, induces depression and dysfunction in family and workplace relationships. Treating appropriately pain is a medical and ethical obligation. Compassion and not indifference should inform the institutional approach in the response to patients affected by pain.