

# DRUG WAR FACTS

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## Diversion of Pharmaceuticals

1. "In 2004, 6.0 million persons were current users of psychotherapeutic drugs taken nonmedically (2.5 percent). These include 4.4 million who used pain relievers, 1.6 million who used tranquilizers, 1.2 million who used stimulants, and 0.3 million who used sedatives. These estimates are all similar to the corresponding estimates for 2003.

"There were significant increases in the lifetime prevalence of use from 2003 to 2004 in several categories of pain relievers among those aged 18 to 25. Specific pain relievers with statistically significant increases in lifetime use were Vicodin®, Lortab®, or Lorcet® (from 15.0 to 16.5 percent); Percocet®, Percodan®, or Tylox® (from 7.8 to 8.7 percent); hydrocodone products (from 16.3 to 17.4 percent); OxyContin® (from 3.6 to 4.3 percent); and oxycodone products (from 8.9 to 10.1 percent)."

*Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (Rockville, MD: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Applied Studies, 2005), p. 1.*

2. "Lifetime nonmedical pain reliever prevalence among youths aged 12 to 17 increased from 2001 (9.6 percent) to 2002 (11.2 percent), continuing an increasing trend from 1989 (1.2 percent). Among young adults aged 18 to 25, the rate increased from 19.4 percent in 2001 to 22.1 percent in 2002. The young adult rate had been 6.8 percent in 1992.

"Lifetime nonmedical use of stimulants increased steadily from 1990 to 2002 for youths aged 12 to 17 (0.7 to 4.3 percent). For young adults aged 18 to 25, rates declined from 1981 to 1994 (from 10.9 to 5.9 percent), then increased to

10.8 percent in 2002. Rates increased between 2001 and 2002 for both youths (3.8 to 4.3 percent) and young adults (10.2 to 10.8 percent)."

*Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (2003). Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (Office of Applied Studies, NHSDA Series H-22, DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836), Rockville, MD, p. 39.*

3. "In 2004, an estimated 2.8 million persons used psychotherapeutics nonmedically for the first time within the past year. The numbers of new users of psychotherapeutics in 2004 were 2.4 million for pain relievers, 1.2 million for tranquilizers, 793,000 for stimulants, and 240,000 for sedatives. These estimates are similar to the corresponding estimates for 2002 and 2003. "The average age of first nonmedical use of psychotherapeutics among recent initiates was 24.7 years. For specific drug classes, the average ages were 23.3 years for pain relievers, 25.2 years for tranquilizers, 24.1 years for stimulants, and 29.3 years for sedatives. "In 2004, the number of new nonmedical users of OxyContin® was 615,000, with an average age at first use of 24.5 years. Comparable data on past year OxyContin® initiation are not available for prior years, but calendar year estimates of OxyContin® initiation show a steady increase in the number of initiates from 1995, the year this drug was first available, through 2003 (Figure 5.5). "The number of recent new users of methamphetamine nonmedically was 318,000 in 2004. Between 2002 and 2004, the number of methamphetamine initiates remained level at around 300,000 per year. The average age of new users was 18.9 years in 2002, 20.4 years in 2003, and 22.1 years in 2004."

*Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (Rockville, MD: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Applied Studies, 2005), p. 50.*

4. The General Accounting Office reported in 2003 that "DEA officials told us that it is difficult to obtain reliable data on what controlled substances are being abused by individuals and diverted from pharmacies because available drug abuse and diversion tracking systems do not capture data on a specific

brand-name product or indicate where a drug product is being abused and diverted on a state and local level. Because of the time lags in reporting information, the data reflect a delayed response to any emerging drug abuse and diversion problem."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 32.*

5. The Journal of Pain and Symptom Management published a research letter by scientists from the Pain & Policy Studies Group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on drug crime as a source of diverted pharmaceuticals. The researchers examined data maintained by the US Drug Enforcement Administration on thefts and other incidents of loss of controlled substances by DEA registrants including pharmacists, manufacturers, and distributors. The data was complete for the years 2000-2003 for 22 Eastern states representing 53% of the US population. According to the researchers: "A total of 12,894 theft/loss incidents were reported in these states between 2000 and 2003. Theft/losses were primarily from pharmacies (89.3%), with smaller portions from medical practitioners, manufacturers, distributors, and some addiction treatment programs that reported theft/losses of methadone. "Over the 4-year period, almost 28 million dosage units of all controlled substances were diverted. The total number of dosage units for the six opioids is as follows: 4,434,731 for oxycodone; 1,026,184 for morphine; 454,503 for methadone; 325,921 for hydromorphone; 132,950 for meperidine; 81,371 for fentanyl."

*Source: Joranson, David E. MSSW & Aaron M. Gilson, PhD, Pain & Policy Studies Group, University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Drug Crime is a Source of Abuse Pain Medication in the United States," Letters, Journal of Pain & Symptom Management, Vol. 30, No. 4, Oct. 2005, p. 299.*

6. "According to IMS Health data, the annual number of OxyContin prescriptions for noncancer pain increased nearly tenfold, from about 670,000 in 1997 to about 6.2 million in 2002.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, during the same 6 years, the annual number of OxyContin prescriptions for cancer pain increased about fourfold, from about 250,000 in 1997 to just over 1 million in 2002. The noncancer

prescriptions therefore increased from about 73 percent of total OxyContin prescriptions to about 85 percent during that period, while the cancer prescriptions decreased from about 27 percent of the total to about 15 percent. IMS Health data indicated that prescriptions for other schedule II opioid drugs, such as Duragesic and morphine products, for noncancer pain also increased during this period. Duragesic prescriptions for noncancer pain were about 46 percent of its total prescriptions in 1997, and increased to about 72 percent of its total in 2002. Morphine products, including, for example, Purdue's MSContin, also experienced an increase in their noncancer prescriptions during the same period. Their noncancer prescriptions were about 42 percent of total prescriptions in 1997, and increased to about 65 percent in 2002."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 18.*

7. "From fiscal year 1996 through fiscal year 2002, DEA initiated 313 investigations involving OxyContin, resulting in 401 arrests. Most of the investigations and arrests occurred after the initiation of the action plan. Since the plan was enacted, DEA initiated 257 investigations and made 302 arrests in fiscal years 2001 and 2002. Among those arrested were several physicians and pharmacists. Fifteen health care professionals either voluntarily surrendered their controlled substance registrations or were immediately suspended from registration by DEA. In addition, DEA reported that \$1,077,500 in fines was assessed and \$742,678 in cash was seized by law enforcement agencies in OxyContin-related cases in 2001 and 2002."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 37.*

8. "At the state level, Medicaid fraud control units have investigated OxyContin abuse and diversion; however, they do not maintain precise data on the number of investigations and enforcement actions completed. Similarly, state medical licensure boards have investigated complaints about physicians who were suspected of abuse and diversion of controlled substances, but they could not provide data on the number of investigations involving OxyContin."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 6.*

9. "There are several factors that may have contributed to the abuse and diversion of OxyContin. OxyContin's formulation as a controlled-release opioid that is twice as potent as morphine may have made it an attractive target for abuse and diversion. In addition, the original label's safety warning advising patients not to crush the tablets because of the possible rapid release of a potentially toxic amount of oxycodone may have inadvertently alerted abusers to possible methods for misuse. Further, the rapid growth in OxyContin sales increased the drug's availability in the marketplace and may have contributed to opportunities to obtain the drug illicitly. The history of abuse and diversion of prescription drugs in some geographic areas, such as those within the Appalachian region, may have predisposed some states to problems with OxyContin. However, we could not assess the relationship between the growth in OxyContin prescriptions or increased availability with the drug's abuse and diversion because the data on abuse and diversion are not reliable, comprehensive, or timely."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 29.*

10. "The large amount of OxyContin available in the marketplace may have increased opportunities for abuse and diversion. Both DEA and Purdue have stated that an increase in a drug's availability in the marketplace may be a factor that attracts interest by those who abuse and divert drugs."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), p. 30.*

11. "According to a 2001 HIDTA [High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area] report, the Appalachian region, which encompasses parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, has been severely affected by prescription drug abuse, particularly pain relievers, including oxycodone, for many years. Three

of the four states -- Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia -- were among the initial states to report OxyContin abuse and diversion. Historically, oxycodone, manufactured under brand names such as Percocet, Percodan, and Tylox, was among the most diverted prescription drugs in Appalachia. According to the report, OxyContin has become the drug of choice of abusers in several areas within the region. The report indicates that many areas of the Appalachian region are rural and poverty-stricken, and the profit potential resulting from the illicit sale of OxyContin may have contributed to its diversion and abuse. In some parts of Kentucky, a 20-milligram OxyContin tablet, which can be purchased by legitimate patients for about \$2, can be sold illicitly for as much as \$25. The potential to supplement their incomes can lure legitimate patients into selling some of their OxyContin to street dealers, according to the HIDTA report."

*Source: General Accounting Office, "Prescription Drugs: Oxycontin Abuse and Diversion and Efforts to Address the Problem," GAO-04-110 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2003), pp. 31-32.*

12. According to a report on prescription drug monitoring programs in the US, of the 24 state programs listed, 17 allow law enforcement to use data to support investigations of prescription abuse, and 8 allow law enforcement to use the data to initiate investigations of prescription abuse.

*Source: "Prescription Monitoring Programs: Current Practices and Consideration of Their Effectiveness," Abt Associates, Presented to the National Institute of Justice Annual Conference on Criminal Justice Research & Evaluation, Washington, DC, July 2005.*

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