

Prescription drugs:

Preventing abuse, while protecting patients' rights

By JOHN STEWART

In a recent Toronto Star article, republished in the May 2 edition of The Sunday Herald, Kelly Toughill crafted a strong and sensitive story of the human tragedy that evolves from the abuse of prescription drugs. As the manufacturer of OxyContin and other opioid analgesics, Purdue Pharma is well aware that drug abuse is a significant health problem - and that like many other prescription analgesics, OxyContin may be targeted for abuse and trafficking.

The Star's coverage of prescription drug abuse underscores a critical public health dilemma: preventing prescription drug abuse, while at the same time protecting patients' rights to appropriate care.

OxyContin and other opioid analgesics were developed in response to recognized therapeutic needs and, when appropriately prescribed and taken correctly, provide valuable, sometimes indispensable, relief of pain. Provincial, national and international guidelines - or "best practices" - for managing chronic pain support their use in appropriately selected patients. Patients with moderate to severe pain from injuries, cancer or other medical conditions should not be denied drugs that can provide needed relief, nor should they feel afraid or ashamed to take the medication they need because these legitimate products have become stigmatized as "drugs of abuse."

Conversely, people who abuse a substance, whether it is a prescription drug, illicit drug or alcohol, may suffer from addiction - a neurobiological disease with genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. Addiction is characterized by craving, loss of control over use, compulsive use, and continued use - in spite of the medical and social harm it produces. People with addiction deserve compassionate treatment for their condition.

Purdue Pharma is working with several stakeholders to help combat the diversion and abuse of prescription drugs. We believe an important part of the answer to the abuse of opioids is enhanced education of health care professionals on effective pain management and ways to reduce abuse and diversion, as well as drug abuse and addiction treatment. There is also a need for education of the public about the serious personal and societal harm that results from drug abuse, and the need for tough law enforcement to reduce diversion, rather than restrictions on patients or the doctors who treat them. Preventing the diversion and abuse of prescription medications will require combined efforts by the medical and pharmacy community, law enforcement,

federal and provincial agencies, and the pharmaceutical industry. Purdue is increasing its activities to combat OxyContin abuse in particular, and prescription drug abuse in general.

Abuse of illicit or legal drugs involves the choices made by individuals to risk serious consequences, such as addiction, overdose and death. The issues of drug abuse were not created by a single drug - nor will the solutions come from a single source. Everyone - in families, schools, communities, law enforcement, government and businesses - needs to play a part in reducing drug abuse. Purdue believes effective pain medications should remain in the hands of those who legitimately need them - and out of the hands of those who would misuse or abuse them.

Patients in pain have a right to have their pain treated, and since prescription drug abuse threatens that right, we will continue to undertake and support activities designed to reduce it.

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