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Epidemic: Responding to America's Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis

Above is the title of a report from the Office of the President of the United States. Calling prescription drug abuse "the Nations fastest-growing drug problem", the White House released a four-step plan to fight prescription drug abuse on April 19, 2011.

Statistics from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health show that prescription drugs were used non-medically by one-third of first time drug users age 12 and over in 2009. The study also showed that 70 percent of the prescription drugs were obtained from friends and relatives.

While there has been a drop in the use of cocaine in recent years, prescription drugs are the second-most-widely abused drug with marijuana being first.

According to an ABC news article on April 19, 2011, Gil Kerlikowske, the White House Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy said, "We are in the midst of a public health crisis driven by prescription drug abuses."

The Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan targets prescription drugs that are classified as opioids, though other prescription drugs are also abused. The plan first begins with education of the public, and health providers of the growing epidemic. The second part of the plan focuses on a tracking and monitoring plan for prescription drugs that will be enacted with the combined efforts of the Federal, state, and local authorities. Third, a disposal plan for unused prescription drugs detailing that the drugs be put into plastic bags with fillers such as coffee grounds, or kitty litter. Flushing unused medications is not recommended unless ingesting the prescription drug could be life-threatening. Finally, the last step is enforcement of policies to stop unethical doctors from prescribing non-medically-necessary prescription drugs to patients, as well as to prevent patients from doctor-shopping to obtain prescription drugs.

The Obama administration summarizes the plan with a call for the Nation to work together saying that no single organization or agency can be responsible for this action. "As a Nation, we must take urgent action to ensure the appropriate balance between the benefits these medications offer in improving lives and the risks they pose" says the Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan.