

Let's "Think about it" some more....

A few months ago I wrote in this space about the Medical Association of Georgia's "Think about it" campaign to help limit or stop the growing problem of prescription drug abuse. These are "legal" drugs prescribed by healthcare providers that are mainly used as pain medicines. These drugs improperly used (i.e., "abused") can lead to addiction, increase crime rates in communities, and can be vicious killers. In 2010, it was estimated that about 25,000 Americans died by taking too much "pain medicine" that they got either legally or illegally. By the year 2014, that number was over 47,000 in just four short years. The CDC also estimates that since the year 2000, over a half million Americans have died for this very reason – prescription drug abuse and overdose. This issue represents a real problem that we must get a handle on or it will continue to needlessly kill our people.

Recently, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) and the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) have come out with new guidelines which state that narcotic pain medicines, like Lortab, Norco, Percocet, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and Hydromorphone – are no longer to be recommended as first line treatment for chronic pain conditions. This is long overdue. These medicines are derived from the opium plant (as is heroin) and are very dangerous.

They were never made for chronic pain in the first place. Their use is in helping with acute (short term) pain from situations like a bone fracture, kidney stone, or getting a surgical incision. This is what they are designed for and represents their best and proper use. They are not designed for, nor do they help much, with chronic pain conditions such as a bad back, arthritis, or neck pain.

But, if you take them on a long term basis for chronic pain, I can guarantee three things – you will develop a tolerance (need more as time goes by), you will become dependent on them, and they will not really help your pain that much. If anything then happens to cause acute pain, such as breaking a bone, or having elective surgery – your pain will be difficult to control without getting close to the "danger zone" of overdose.

Over a period of time, the pills may no longer help your pain that much, but you cannot do without the narcotic effect, and it could even be dangerous to run out or stop suddenly (withdrawal). It is very true that "...at first you take these pills to feel better, after a while you take them to keep from feeling bad."

If you are prescribed narcotic pain medicines, use them responsibly per the directions, keep them safe and secured so they are not stolen or lost or fall into the wrong hands. Take them as needed and stop when they are no longer needed. Safely dispose of any remaining medicine no longer needed or out of date. We can help with this growing problem that is needlessly killing our fellow Americans if we know how dangerous these drugs can be, and just... "Think About It."

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