

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Just Because It Is Prescribed By A Doctor Does Not Mean It Is Okay

Our society places a high value on the use of prescription medications to relieve physical and emotional pain, but at what cost? The majority of the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) drug use cases are not related to the use of illegal drugs, but the misuse or overuse of prescription medications.

Most prescription pain relief medications are controlled substances and carry risks that are explained in the information packet provided by the pharmacy. According to the *PDR Drug Guide for Mental Health Professionals*, some of the precautions that accompany these medications are “may cause patient to become drowsy or less alert,” or “avoid alcohol with taking this medication,” or “medication should be taken exactly as prescribed,” or “tolerance and dependence can develop with the use” of this medication. Generally, prescription pain relief and emotional relief medications “should not be taken for a longer time or for any other purpose than was prescribed.”

During an alcohol/substance use assessment, we often hear, “my doctor prescribed it to me” or “I was just following my doctor’s orders” in regards to prescription pain medications, or sedatives such as Xanax and Ativan. Although you trust your doctor, your doctor is not the expert of you. The only person that is the expert of you is YOU. If you notice you need to take more of the medication to achieve the desired effects (reducing pain, to feel or function ‘normally’) that may be an indication that your tolerance has increased. If you are adding in other prescription medications, or using the medications for a longer period of time than they were intended to be used, or for reasons other than prescribed, you have likely moved from using the medication to misusing or overusing the medication. Thus, if it does not feel right, contact your provider immediately in order to change the dosage, or obtain a different prescription with less risks or side effects.

People who become addicted to pain medication do not set out to become addicted. Usually an accident, injury, or surgery leads to the initial prescription for pain medication. Eventually, appropriate and temporary use of medications for pain relief can become a serious and problematic addiction to the medication. Due to the high risk of addiction, seek out other pain relief alternatives that may work for you. Do not stop taking the medication without medical advice, as some medications need to be tapered off to discontinue use.

Remember, all medications should be taken as prescribed, and sharing or taking someone else’s medication is not only unethical, it is illegal. If you suspect you, or a colleague, may be struggling with overuse or long-term use of a medication that is interfering with family life or responsibilities, please contact the NE LAP to help determine your next step.

If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about sobriety and recovery, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our web site at www.lapne.org. If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Coordinator, or Nicole Winkler, NE LAP Counselor.