

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A SERVICE OF BEST CARE EAP

Use Caution When Using Prescription Drugs for Pain Relief

The Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) provides alcohol/drug assessments, treatment referrals, case management/monitoring and education services for Nebraska health service professionals. Would you have estimated that a little less than sixty percent of our cases are alcohol related? You may have thought this figure would be higher considering the predominant role of alcohol use in our society. Over forty percent of our cases are drug-related abuse and/or addiction problem situations.

It is important to know that the majority of these cases are not related to use of illegal drugs. Most of these cases involve prescription drug abuse and addiction. Our society places a high value on use of prescription medications to relieve emotional and physical pain. Health care professionals, who work in environments where medications are an integral, sometimes essential, component to pain relief and healing, place an even higher value on medication than the overall general population.

Health care professionals' value for medication can lead them to also turn to medications for pain relief rather than alternative solutions. If the medications are effective, it can cement their belief that pain relief medications are their only pain solution. As the medications provide physical and emotional relief, the long term or extensive use of these drugs can lead to abuse and addiction.

Most pain relief medications are controlled substances and carry risk. One need only review the instructions for the use of these drugs in the *PDR Drug Guide for Mental Health Professionals* to find cautions on their use, such as "may cause patient to become drowsy or less alert," or "avoid alcohol while taking this medication," or "taken with certain other drugs, the effects of either could be increased, decreased or altered," or "medication should be taken exactly as prescribed," and finally "tolerance and dependence can develop with the use" of this medication. Generally, emotional and pain relief medications "should not be taken for a longer time or for any other purpose than prescribed."

As you have seen from the NE LAP's case statistics, health care professionals can also become victims of drugs that can be so helpful and necessary for pain relief. Abuse of the drug takes over and the drug is not taken as prescribed. More of the drug is needed. Other prescription drugs may be added to the mix. The drugs are used over a long period of time. Eventually, appropriate and temporary use of medications for pain relief can become a serious and problematic addiction to the drugs. In the midst of a drug addiction, the addicted health care professional's impairment or diversion of drugs at work can lead to loss of practice privileges or his/her job, and a referral to the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program.

Long term use of narcotics can lead to addiction to these drugs. Seek out other pain relief alternatives that will work for you. If you are using prescription medication, these medications should be taken as prescribed. Consult with your doctor or the NE LAP if you are concerned your use may have become drug abuse or addiction.

If you are a licensed health service professional wanting more information about alcohol/drug abuse or addiction treatment, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 8055 or visit our web site at www.lapne.org. If you would like to schedule an educational presentation on alcohol/drug addiction and the health service professional, please ask for Judi Leibrock, NE LAP Coordinator.

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