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Wright State University & the University of Akron

Emerging Reports about Concurrent Use of Tylenol® PM and Heroin in Dayton

At the June 2007 OSAM Network meeting, Regional Epidemiologists in Dayton reported that Tylenol® PM is being used in conjunction with heroin. Reportedly, Tylenol® PM and similar over-the-counter medications containing antihistamines are being taken to enhance the effects of heroin. For example, an HIV prevention specialist noted, "The Tylenol® PM... I am telling, they [heroin injectors] are addicted to them. They want the Tylenol® PM and the Nyquil® with their stuff [heroin]." A similar pattern of use was reported among individuals in treatment for heroin addiction who take Tylenol® PM in combination with methadone. A recovering heroin user commented:

If you are using it [Tylenol® PM] with heroin, it makes you nod more.... I know a lot of people on methadone that buy over the counter "PMs." They don't have to be Tylenol®, any "PM" after it.... They buy them, and they take them because they say they get a nod off their methadone with them.... It enhances the methadone for them....

Besides acetaminophen, an anti-pyretic and analgesic drug with no psychoactive effects, Tylenol® PM contains diphenhydramine, an antihistamine that has sedative properties. Similarly, medications within the Nyquil® product line contain the antihistamine, doxylamine, which, like diphenhydramine, has sedative properties. Cases of heroin used in conjunction with Benadryl® (diphenhydramine) were previously reported by users in the Cincinnati area. Likewise, sporadic reports of opioids used in combination with Phenergan® (promethazine), a prescription drug with antihistamine actions, have surfaced in the past among heroin users in Dayton, Cincinnati, Youngstown and Toledo. Concurrent use of heroin or other opioids with antihistamines may produce additive central nervous system effects, resulting in serious respiratory depression, hypotension, and sedation.

A powdered form of Tylenol® PM, added to a small amount of black tar heroin, is the main ingredient in "cheese," a so-called "starter-form" of heroin, that has recently increased in popularity among teenagers in the Dallas, Texas, area.* According to preliminary OSAM data, concurrent Tylenol® PM and heroin use in Dayton was reported among older, more experienced heroin users. Unlike "cheese," which is typically used intranasally, Tylenol® PM among Dayton area users is taken orally after heroin administration. The practice of using Tylenol® PM and similar over-the-counter medications in conjunction with heroin resembles another known and currently more common pattern of abuse in which benzodiazepines are used in combination with heroin and other opioids. The pattern of concomitant heroin and Tylenol® PM and similar over-the-counter medication abuse, as well as the extent of this practice, will be assessed in future OSAM Network reports.

* For more information on "cheese" go to <http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/gcattc/documents/cheeseheroin5-2-07.pdf>.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Regional Epidemiologists located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the June 2007 OSAM Network meeting.

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