

**HEALTHY MINDS**  
**A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS**  
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**Legal Drugs Cause Much More Death Than Illegal Ones**



An article published in the New York Times, on June 14, 2008 pointed out that in Florida, and probably nationwide, prescription drugs kill three times as many people as all illegal drugs combined, according to an analysis of 2007 autopsies. For the last eight years, Floridians have been turning more and more towards prescription-drug abuse and the trend is still increasing.

These drugs are obtained in many ways: from health-care providers who over prescribe or prescribe drugs intended for abuse or “recreation”; from “doctor shopping”, where “patients” go to several doctors to ask for the same drugs, often pain-killers; from illegal internet sales; from individuals who sell their prescriptions to others (such as children selling their ADHD Ritalin to other children because of the stimulant effect), and; from dealers who sell the wares from drug shipment robberies.

According to this article, DEA (federal Drug Enforcement Agency) estimates that seven million Americans abuse prescription drugs, nearly a doubling in six years. This number is far greater than the total abusing cocaine, heroin, Ecstasy, inhalants, and hallucinogens.

The Florida report analyzed about 169,000 deaths statewide from all causes. Methamphetamines, cocaine, and heroin caused 989 deaths while legal opioids (painkillers like Viococin and OxyContin) caused 2,328 deaths. Furthermore, benzodiazepines (like Valium and Xanax) caused 743 deaths. The most common drug, alcohol killed 466, although it was found in the bodies of 4,179 deceased.

Cocaine killed 843, heroin killed 110, methamphetamine killed 25, and marijuana did not kill anyone (0), according to the Florida report. Florida keeps closer track of drug-related deaths than any other state, but does not monitor sales. Thirty eight states, however, do keep track of such sales. According to Mike Morgan, pharmacist in Burkesville, KY, Kentucky is one of the states that does monitor and report the sale of narcotics through the CASPER system.

In Broward County, Florida, where one deputy Sheriff said that the situation had reached epidemic proportions, several pharmacies instituted a buy-back program where \$5 gift certificates were given to those who cleaned out their medicine cabinets and brought in unused pharmaceuticals in order to keep them out of the hands of potential abusers, especially children.

**TIP OF THE WEEK:** In a recent Department of Defense supported study it was found that returning Iraq war veterans have sleep disturbances as bad as chronic insomniacs. They were measured in sleep center laboratories and compared with normal sleeps and

insomniacs. These vets took longer to fall asleep than the normal group. They were also measured for quality of sleep, and if they kicked and/or screamed during the night. These symptoms are related to PTSD, of which so many returning veterans suffer.