

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION/TRAINING GUIDE

BACKGROUND

In 2010, the CDC deemed prescription drug abuse an epidemic in the United States and the fastest growing drug problem¹. The New York City Poison Control Center noted, "Prescription drug abuse has become a modern-day epidemic in the United States and is now second only to marijuana use across all age groups."² The Navy and Marine Corps are not immune to this issue and in recent years, the rise of prescription drug misuse has put Sailors and Marines at risk. Just one instance of prescription drug misuse can lead a Sailor or Marine down a path of addiction, or even death.

The Navy's zero tolerance policy on illicit drug abuse has resulted in an overall steady decline over the past decade and use of illegal drugs such as THC, cocaine and heroin are all on the decline. However, at the same time, the use of prescription drugs is on the rise, increasing the potential for misuse. In the past three years, amphetamine positives have increased 34 percent and oxycodone positives by 23 percent on Navy samples tested for these drugs. Drug use puts Sailors and Marines' lives and missions at risk, undercuts unit readiness and morale, and is inconsistent with the Navy and Marine Corps' ethos and core values of honor, courage and commitment. In recent years, the definition of drug use has expanded to include the misuse of prescription drugs, or the use of prescription medications for nonmedical reasons or in ways not prescribed by a physician. Although prescription drugs are a legal, safe method of treating injury and illness when taken as prescribed by a physician, improper use is both illegal and dangerous—and in some cases deadly.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

The Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Office, part of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor Office, developed the "Prescription for Discharge" campaign to educate Sailors, Marines and their family members on the safe and proper use of prescription drugs. Support from every level of Navy leadership is vital to this initiative. Leadership can serve as advocates for prescription drug safety by taking the following steps:

- Educate your Sailors and Marines on the proper use of prescription drugs and the health and safety risks of misuse.
- Engage your drug abuse prevention personnel to stay aware of prescription drug related issues and policies.
- Lead by example by modeling proper use and disposal tactics for prescription drugs as appropriate.
- Be consistent in your message and reinforcement of Navy policies.

Navy Drug Use Policy

Navy and Marine Corps drug use policies explicitly prohibit wrongful use of prescription drugs and require Sailors and Marines with legitimate prescriptions to self-report so that they can be validated during the drug testing process. The Navy's drug use policy states:

- Navy members shall never wrongfully possess, distribute or abuse drugs, be in possession of drug abuse paraphernalia, *or be under the unauthorized influence of prescribed drugs.*
- Drug abuse also includes the wrongful use of controlled substance analogues, such as designer drugs, illicit use of anabolic steroids, *and the wrongful use of prescription and/or over-the-counter drugs and medications.*
- Members shall report all prescription medications received from non-military Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs) to their chain of command and ensure they are entered into their military health record.
- Members who self-report as positive for prescription drugs as a result of a legitimate prescription medication may be retained on active duty, provided commands submit a request to OPNAV (N170) that explains why the positive urinalysis is not a drug abuse incident.
- Navy's drug abuse policy supersedes any foreign, State, or local ordinance that permits the use, possession, distribution or prescription of a controlled substance.
- *For more information, see [OPNAVINST 5350.4D](#) (04 June 2009)*

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Policy impact: prescription painkiller overdoses. Atlanta, GA Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/>

² Hernandez, S. H., & Nelson, L. S. (2010, August). Prescription drug abuse: Insight into the epidemic (Research Report No. 20686478). New York City Poison Control Center.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide is meant to assist Navy leadership in their efforts to educate Sailors and Marines on the safe and proper use of prescription medications, what constitutes prescription drug misuse, and the consequences associated with abusing prescription drugs.

It is intended to be used in conjunction with safety standdowns, specifically during months and weeks that recognize health issues associated with prescription drug use. For example, October is recognized as National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month and National Substance Abuse Awareness Month.

Additionally, the Navy and Marine Corps partner with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) by participating in the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days held each year in April and October. The event offers Navy and Marine Corps personnel and their families a safe venue to turn in expired, unused and unwanted prescription drugs to a local drop off site anonymously and free of charge. See Table 1 for a full list of health awareness months and to see where you may be able to incorporate this messaging into your briefings.

The topics and associated talking points below are intended to provide you with accurate, up-to-date, and accessible messages to share all Navy and Marine Corps personnel regarding prescription drug misuse. For more information and resources, visit the Prescription for Discharge campaign website at www.nadap.navy.mil. Here you can find additional materials and messages to share with Sailors and Marines on how to properly use and dispose of prescription medication, support for prescription drug abuse prevention efforts, and tips on how to identify when a Sailor or Marine should seek additional help.

TALKING POINTS

Zero Tolerance. Infinite Risk.

The Prescription for Discharge campaign tagline, “Zero Tolerance. Infinite Risk,” is meant to provide Sailors and Marines with a direct message that the Navy and Marine Corps has a zero tolerance policy for prescription drug abuse and that misusing prescription drugs puts both their career and health at severe risk.

Sailors associate the term “zero tolerance” with the risk of losing their careers. It is important that Sailors and Marines fully understand the Navy and Marine Corps policy on prescription drug use and that misusing it can lead to disciplinary action.

Sample messages to share with Sailors and Marines:

- Prescription drug misuse will not be tolerated in the Navy and Marine Corps. Misusing or abusing prescription drugs is just as dangerous as the use of illegal drugs. In fact, more people die of prescription painkiller overdoses than cocaine and heroin combined.
- More than 1,000 Sailors and Marines popped positive for prescription drug abuse in 2012. Without a legitimate prescription, a Sailor or Marine whose drug test is positive for prescription medication may be processed for separation.
- The Navy tests for prescription drugs in an effort to ensure mission readiness and the safety of all Sailors and Marines. Misusing prescription drugs puts you and your fellow shipmates at risk. Prescription medications can have harmful effects on your body if they were not prescribed to you, or used out of context.
- Always alert your Navy medical facility when you receive a prescription from a civilian doctor so it can be entered into your record. Also tell your command urinalysis coordinator at the time of testing so that all of your prescriptions are documented in the event of a positive test.
- Take the proper steps to ensure your prescription medications are inaccessible to others. Don't leave your medications out in the open in your room or bathroom. If medication is found left out in the open during a room inspection, you and your roommate could both be held responsible.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

Proper Use of Prescription Drugs

It is crucial that all Navy and Marine Corps personnel understand how to properly use and dispose of their prescription medications. There are four primary steps to follow for safe use of prescription drugs:

1. **Take correctly by following your doctor's orders and prescription instructions precisely.**
2. **Report promptly to ensure that both Navy Medical and your command are aware of your current prescriptions.**
3. **Dispose properly by placing unused medication in small plastic bag mixed with water and an undesirable substance (such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and throw the bag in the trash. Cross out all personal information on the prescription label before recycling the bottle. This prevents people from taking a prescription drug not intended for them while also protecting your personal information.**
4. **Never share your prescription medication with a friend, shipmate, or family member.**

As leaders, it is important to remind Sailors and Marines of these four steps and emphasize the importance of adhering to them.

Sample messages to share with Sailors and Marines:

- Most people who have reported misusing prescription medications say they got the drugs from a family member or a friend. Don't share your prescription medicine. Sharing your medicine is illegal and just as serious of an offense as taking the drugs yourself without a prescription.
- If you find yourself wanting or needing to take more than the prescribed dosage of your medication, speak to a doctor immediately. Never take it upon yourself to decide how much or for how long you should be taking a prescription medication. Increasing the dose yourself could put you on a fast track to addiction, overdose, or even death.
- Sharing prescription medications with others will put yourself and the other person at serious risk. Your medicines are prescribed to you based on a wide range of factors, and could cause a bad reaction if used by someone else. You never know what medical conditions, allergies, or other medications someone else might have.
- If your friend or shipmate asks if they can take some of your prescription medication, tell them they should go see a doctor if they think something might be wrong. You're not their doctor and sharing your prescription drugs is not doing them any favors.
- Don't ever mix prescription medications with another drug, including alcohol, without speaking with a doctor first. Mixing prescription drugs can be fatal if you don't know the potential side effects and consequences of the drugs' interactions.

Disposing of Your Prescription Drugs

The Prescription for Discharge campaign recommends several ways to dispose of your medications easily and safely. The easiest way is to dispose of medication properly by placing unused or expired medication in small plastic bag mixed with water and an undesirable substance (such as used coffee grounds) and throw the bag in the trash. Cross out all personal information from the prescription labels before recycling the bottle. Below are some additional tips that you can pass along to help educate Sailors and Marines on the importance of disposing of their unused or expired medications.

Sample messages to share with Sailors and Marines:

- Regardless of whether or not your medication has an identifiable expiration date, it is important to discuss with your doctor the amount of time you should keep your prescription. Not only are you putting yourself at risk by keeping expired or old medication around, but you are also putting anyone who may have access to the medication at risk.
- The safest way to dispose of your prescription drugs is during a National Take-Back Day, held by the DEA every April and October. These events offer Navy and Marine Corps personnel a safe venue to turn in expired, unused and unwanted prescription drugs to a local drop off site anonymously and free of charge. Go to the Prescription for Discharge website for this information on how to locate a participating pharmacy at www.nadap.navy.mil.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

- It is commonly thought that you should flush any unused or expired medication down the toilet. However, this can send harmful chemicals into our waterways. If there is any doubt of whether your medications can be flushed, call your local pharmacy.
- I'm sure some of you have been in situations where you don't feel like you need to use all the medication prescribed to you. However, it's best to clarify with your doctor if and when you should stop taking your medication. For example, it can be particularly bad to prematurely stop taking an antibiotic. Always talk with your doctor about how long you should be taking a medication, and when it's okay to dispose of the unused drugs.

HEALTH TOPICS BY MONTH

For time and event-bound messages, see the Navy's health awareness and observance months below, along with some sample messaging to accompany these events.

Navy Health Awareness and Observance Months

Months	Awareness Topic	Sample Message
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Year's resolutions • National Drug Facts Week (Jan. 27-Feb. 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy New Year! Start the new year off right by cleaning out your medicine cabinet. If you have any unused or expired medication lingering in your medicine cabinet, you can dispose of them by dumping them into a small plastic bag with water and used coffee grinds or another undesirable substance and throw it in the trash. Cross out all personal information from the prescription label before recycling the bottle to protect your identity.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating Disorders Awareness Week (Feb. 23-March 1) • National Heart Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using your prescription medication for a purpose other than prescribed, such as to lose weight, is very dangerous to your health. If you or someone you know uses their own or someone else's prescription medication for weight loss, talk to them about getting help. • Young adults who misuse stimulants like Adderall may be at a greater risk for a heart attack. Never take a friend's prescription stimulant. There's no such thing as a good excuse—especially when it's a clear violation of Navy policy and will result in disciplinary action.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abusing or misusing prescription medication can poison your body. Always follow the form and dose instructions provided by your doctor.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol Abuse Awareness Month • National Take-Back Day (April 26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some prescription medications should not be mixed with alcohol, as they can both slow down the heart rate—potentially to a dead stop. If you're taking a prescription medication, always ask your doctor and read the warning labels before drinking alcohol. • Participate in this month's National Take-Back Day on April 26th. You can give back unused or expired medications to get them off your hands anonymously and free of charge.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Month • Memorial Day (May 26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety, stress and depression can be common among service members. If you think you may be struggling do not self-prescribe or use others' medications. Consult your doctor immediately. • Memorial Day is meant to remember the fallen men and women who died serving our country. Honor them by preserving your health and never abusing prescription medication.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Day Against Drug Abuse & Illicit Trafficking (June 26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today is the International Day Against Drug Abuse. This includes the misuse of prescription drugs. Never share your own prescription medications or take someone else's.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4th of July 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy 4th of July! Thank you for all you've done to protect this country. Your safety is important to us and to our mission. Make sure you know the rules about prescription drug use. Check out the Prescription for Discharge campaign website to review the Navy's policy on prescription drug use and stay a stellar Sailor.
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain Awareness Week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We know that this job takes its toll on the body. If you're experiencing pain, do not self-prescribe or take more than the recommended amount of pain medication. Talk to your doctor.
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Addiction Recovery Month • National Suicide Prevention • Suicide Prevention Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This month is National Drug Abuse Addiction Recovery Month. If you or someone you know has become addicted to prescription drugs, speak with your doctor or substance abuse rehabilitation counselor to get help before you hit rock bottom. • Research shows that those who use prescription drugs for non-medical purposes are at increased risk of depression and thoughts of suicide. If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide, call the Military Crisis Line Other resources are available at www.suicide.navy.mil.
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance Abuse Awareness Month • National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month • National Take-Back Day (October 25) • Bullying Prevention Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Navy and Marine Corps' zero tolerance policy for drug abuse includes the misuse of prescription medications. We encourage all of you to visit the Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Facebook Page where they will be posting facts about prescription drug use throughout the month, or check out the Prescription for Discharge campaign website at www.nadap.navy.mil. • Participate in this month's National Take-Back Day on October 25 to help rid your home of any expired or unused medications. You'll be preventing them from getting into the wrong hands... and saving yourself from being held accountable for others' use. • Don't let friends or shipmates bully you into sharing your meds. You could be putting yourself and your friend in serious risk.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran's Day (November 11) • Thanksgiving (November 27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor our veterans by working hard in your military career. Don't risk your life or your career by misusing meds. • Are you hosting family or friends for the Thanksgiving Holiday? Make sure you keep your prescription medications stored safely out of the reach of others. You never know who might be interested in borrowing some of your meds...
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Drunk and Drugged Driving Month • Winter holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you know that some painkillers and depressants, like sleeping aids or anxiety medications, can influence your ability to drive? Falling asleep behind the wheel is just as dangerous as drunk driving. Don't put yourself or others on the road at risk. • The holidays offer many reasons to celebrate—but they can also bring stress and anxiety, especially for those who cannot be with loved ones. Don't turn to self-medication as a solution. If you or someone you know might be struggling with prescription drug misuse, seek confidential counseling from your chaplain.