

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

NAVY MEDICAL PERSONNEL TALKING POINTS

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the rise of prescription drug abuse and misuse has put Sailors and Marines' lives and missions at risk. As you well know, just one instance of prescription drug abuse can lead a patient 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. Reports show that 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 abuse. In the past three years, amphetamine positives have increased 34 percent and oxycodone positives by 23 percent on Navy samples tested for these drugs.

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)*

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. Medical personnel are the Navy's frontline in this initiative. These talking points are meant to provide medical personnel with key messages and topic areas for discussing prescription drug use, misuse and abuse with patients and their family members and caregivers.

Below are some general guidelines to keep in mind when counseling your patients:

- Make sure your patients understand how to properly use and dispose of their prescription medication, including:
 - The dose and duration of the script
 - Who they need to report their prescription to (Medical, Command (during drug testing), etc.)
 - When and where to bring back unused meds
 - Risks of combining medication with alcohol or other drugs (including other prescription and over-the-counter drugs)
- Many Sailors and Marines think they can take medications leftover from a previous injury or ailment, particularly if there is no expiration date on the prescription label. However, testing positive for drugs that are not currently prescribed can result in separation from the Navy or Marine Corps, not to mention serious health risks. It is imperative that your patients understand this policy and the related risks of abuse at the point of obtaining their original prescription.

PRESCRIPTION FOR DISCHARGE

The topics and associated talking points below are intended to provide you with easily accessible messages to share with your patients regarding prescription drug misuse and abuse. 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

Ensuring Proper Use of Prescriptions

Patients rely on their doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to fully explain the proper use of their prescription medications, including form and dose, and to alert them of any potential side effects and risks associated with their prescription medications.

Sample messages to share directly with your patients include:

- When it comes to pain, don't self-medicate. More people die of prescription painkiller overdoses than cocaine and heroin combined. If you think you need medication or more than you're already prescribed, contact your doctor.
- Don't ever mix prescription drugs with other medications or alcohol without checking with your doctor first.
 - *Note: If drugs are potentially fatal when mixed with something, inform patients of substances to avoid.*
- Drugs are prescribed for a specific duration of time, which may or may not correlate with the drug's expiration date depending on whether or not the drug is prescribed for chronic, long-term use or limited, one-time use. If you feel that you may need to take your prescriptions longer than prescribed, call your doctor.
- When you have completed your treatment regimen it's your responsibility to safely dispose of your prescription drugs. One easy way to ensure that your prescription drugs don't end up in the wrong hands is by mixing them in a plastic bag with an undesirable substance, such as kitty litter or used coffee grounds, and then throwing the bag in the trash.
- The safest way to dispose of unused prescription drugs is to participate in National Take-Back Days held each year in April and October. If you have any questions about how these work please feel free to reach to your Navy medical facility or pharmacy.

Prescription Drug Abuse and Addiction Prevention

You are a vital and credible source to educate your patients on the dangers associated with prescription drug abuse. Sharing the messages below will allow Sailors and Marines to understand how abusing a prescription drug can negatively affect their health and career.

Sample messages to share directly with your patients include:

- Long-term, repeated use of any drug, including prescription medications, can alter the way the brain functions. Changes in your brain interfere with your ability to think clearly, exercise good judgment, control your behavior, and feel normal without drugs.
- The most commonly abused drugs—painkillers, depressants and stimulants—all have one thing in common: they can be addictive. Painkillers, which act on the same receptors as heroin to trigger feelings of pleasure or numbness, are especially susceptible to addiction.
- Addiction can feel uncontrollable and affect everything else in your life, including family, friends, career, and even your own health and happiness. The most important thing is to recognize you're struggling with addiction and get help.
- There can be fatal consequences to the nonmedical use of a prescription drug, especially when mixed with alcohol or another substance. Always be up front with your doctor about your drinking habits and use of other prescription drugs.
- Be wary of ordering prescription drugs online. There are many fake, illegal pharmacies online that offer medication at prices too good to be true and/or without requiring a prescription from a doctor—this is a sure sign that the pharmacy is a dangerous fraud.