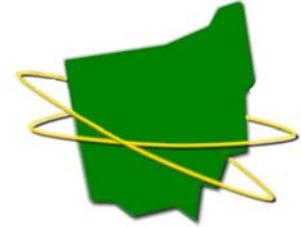




# OSAM-O-GRAM

DATE: June 2003

DATELINE: Ohio



Wright State University  
The University of Akron

## Part I. Prescription Analgesic Abuse: Patterns of Prescription Analgesic Abuse and Perceived Risks

The OSAM Network conducted a rapid response investigation on prescription analgesic abuse to provide the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) with information to help design prevention services and inform treatment needs. Regional Epidemiologists in Akron, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown, and the rural southeast interviewed 43 individuals with a recent history of prescription analgesic abuse.

Three main types of prescription analgesic abusers were identified. The first group included individuals dependent on prescription analgesics who used the drugs on a daily basis and considered them their primary drug of choice. A second group included heroin users who would occasionally substitute heroin with prescription analgesics. A third group of users used prescription analgesics occasionally, typically in combination with other substances. Some of these individuals were still in the “experimental” stage of their drug using careers.

Participants who were dependent on prescription analgesics reported how they switched to more potent drugs as their tolerance increased. Several participants reported that their abuse went “out of control” once they “discovered” OxyContin® (oxycodone controlled-release). In addition, several participants reported eventually switching to heroin, a less expensive and more readily available alternative to pharmaceutical opioids. For example, a 42-year-old man who eventually became a heroin injector, explained:

*I can't remember what year it was. But I remember distinctly, um, someone said to me, "You're spending all that money on those "Oxys," man, where as for \$20 you can buy an amount of heroin that would exceed any "Oxy" that I was doing..." I wanted to try that, and um, after I tried the heroin, I didn't really want "Oxys," was nothing to me anymore....*

The majority of participants reported concurrent abuse of other substances. Some young users reported abusing prescription analgesics in combination with alcohol and marijuana to enhance the intoxicating effects of those drugs. Some opioid dependent individuals reported that prescription analgesics made them feel energized, and they used Xanax® (alprazolam) or Valium® (diazepam) to “balance” this “speedy” high. Conversely, in other cases prescription analgesics were used to come down from a crack-cocaine or some other stimulant high.

The majority of the long-term users reported various health problems and risks associated with prescription analgesic abuse, most of which they had experienced themselves. Rapid progression to serious drug dependence and eventually turning to heroin injection were cited as important risk factors. Drug overdose, liver damage, kidney and other organ damage were also cited as important risk factors. Typically, younger users who abused prescription analgesics occasionally, and often in combination with other substances, were aware of the various risks associated with prescription analgesic abuse. However, they believed that occasional abuse had low risks and insignificant health effects. Prevention and treatment interventions should take into account different patterns of prescription analgesic abuse.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants 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 2003 OSAM Network meeting.

Harvey A. Siegal, Ph.D., Director, Center for Interventions, Treatment, and Addictions Research;  
Robert G. Carlson, Ph.D.; Deric R. Kenne, M.S., Raminta Daniulaityte, PhD  
(937) 775-2066 (office) (937) 775-2171 (fax) <http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/>  
Wright State University, School of Medicine, 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy., Dayton, OH 45435-0001  
For more information, visit the ODADAS website: [www.state.oh.us/ada/odada.htm](http://www.state.oh.us/ada/odada.htm).