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Addiction to Prescription Painkillers and Heroin Surges in Pittsburgh, Most Widely Abused Drugs Citywide

-- Heroin causing more than half of overdose deaths; resources on private office-based treatment available for Pittsburgh consumers --

Richmond, VA (May 31, 2006) – Opioid addiction in Pittsburgh is a growing public health concern that affects people from all walks of life. In Pittsburgh, opioid drugs such as oxycodone, morphine, and heroin are the most widely abused drugs, according to a report by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. And a report published in 2003 showed that heroin was involved in more than half of the accidental overdose deaths in Allegheny County. From a public health perspective, this means that opioid dependence is affecting increasing numbers of Pittsburgh residents with the potentially life-threatening consequences of this chronic disease.

Pittsburgh's problems reflect a national public health crisis – according to the most recent *National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2005)*, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 4.4 million teens and adults nationwide reported using prescription opioid painkillers for nonmedical purposes. In addition, in terms of new users, in 2004 more people abused opioid pain relievers for the first time than any other drug, including marijuana and cocaine, and opioid painkillers are the most heavily abused substance among teens and young adults. An estimated 1.5 million more Americans abuse heroin.

Many people do not fully understand the danger of misusing opioid painkillers. A national survey on the public's perceptions of opioid addiction, *Prescription Painkiller/Heroin Addiction and Treatment*, revealed that nearly half of the US public does not know that misusing prescription opioid painkillers is as harmful to the body, and fully as addictive, as heroin abuse.

“Dependence on opioids is a serious and growing health concern right here in the Pittsburgh area,” said Dr. Neil A. Capretto, Medical Director, Gateway Rehabilitation Center. “My facility has seen nearly a 600% increase over the past five years in admissions for opioid abuse – prescription painkillers and heroin – and in particular I have seen opioid painkiller abuse skyrocket among young people. There is a great need for more Pittsburgh doctors to treat this disease. The good news is that although opioid

addiction is a chronic disease that can happen to anyone, it can now be medically treated, just as we treat other long-term conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure.” It is now possible for any doctor to take the training to become certified to treat opioid dependence in his or her private office using an FDA-approved medicine. Many patients prefer the privacy, convenience, and discretion that office-based treatment offers. “Although several more Pittsburgh-area doctors have recently become certified to treat opioid dependence in their offices, I would encourage more to do so. I have seen tremendous success with medical treatment at my facility, and there are thousands more Pittsburgh residents who need this help.”

Resources for Opioid Dependence and Its Treatment

Addiction to opioids is defined as a long-term brain disease by the World Health Organization and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. It is a treatable medical condition that is caused by changes in the chemistry of the brain. This dependence can start with use of medicine that a doctor prescribes for serious pain but that a person continues to use after the medical need for pain relief has passed. Or it may begin as recreational drug use that spins out of control.

Individuals who need more information about opioid dependence and its treatment, either for themselves or for someone they are concerned about, have several options. Educational materials on opioid dependence are available to answer questions about this often-misunderstood disease and the treatments that are available for it. To receive a free educational Resource Kit on these topics, visit turntohelp.com or call **1-866-455-TURN**, both provided by Reckitt Benckiser Pharmaceuticals.

Additionally, the non-profit patient advocacy group NAABT – National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment – is dedicated to helping educate the public on opioid dependence and treatment in a private doctor’s office. “Increasingly more people are contacting NAABT for information on opioid dependence and treatment,” said Timothy Lepak, president of NAABT. “This is a disease that does not discriminate. It affects people from all walks of life and all socioeconomic and demographic levels.”

For more information on Pittsburgh physicians who can prescribe medicine to treat opioid dependence in a private medical office, visit naabt.org. SAMHSA’s Web site also provides a physician locator and other valuable information at buprenorphine.samhsa.gov.

In the United States, Suboxone® (buprenorphine HCl/naloxone HCl dihydrate) C-III Sublingual Tablets and Subutex® (buprenorphine HCl) C-III Sublingual Tablets are the only controlled medications under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 approved by the FDA for treatment of opioid dependence in a doctor’s office. Suboxone and Subutex are manufactured by Reckitt Benckiser Pharmaceuticals.

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Reckitt Benckiser Pharmaceuticals Inc. is a specialty pharmaceutical company that manufactures and markets Suboxone® (buprenorphine HCl/naloxone HCl dihydrate) [2

mg/0.5 mg and 8 mg/2 mg]) C-III Sublingual Tablets and Subutex® (buprenorphine HCl [2 mg and 8 mg]) C-III Sublingual Tablets, formulations of buprenorphine used to treat opioid dependence. Suboxone and Subutex are the only controlled medications under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 approved by the FDA for office-based treatment of opioid dependence. Reckitt Benckiser Pharmaceuticals Inc. is committed to expanding access to medical therapies for patients suffering from the chronic, relapsing brain disease of opioid dependence. For more information, visit suboxone.com or opioiddependence.com. Reckitt Benckiser Pharmaceuticals Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Reckitt Benckiser PLC, a publicly traded UK firm.

Important Safety Information

Intravenous use of buprenorphine, usually in combination with benzodiazepines or other CNS depressants has been associated with significant respiratory depression and death. Suboxone® and Subutex® have potential for abuse and produces dependence of the opioid type with a milder withdrawal syndrome than full agonists. Cytolytic hepatitis and hepatitis with jaundice have been observed in the addicted population receiving buprenorphine. There are no adequate and well-controlled studies of Suboxone or Subutex (a pregnancy category C medication) in pregnancy. Due caution should be exercised when driving cars or operating machinery. The most commonly reported adverse events with Suboxone have included headache (36%, placebo 22%), withdrawal syndrome (25%, placebo 37%), pain (22%, placebo 19%), nausea (15%, placebo 11%), insomnia (14%, placebo 16%), sweating (14%, placebo 10%). See full prescribing information for complete information.

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