

## Every 14 Minutes ... Someone Dies From Prescription Drugs

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When I was in the Navy during the Vietnam War, there was a sign posted just outside the base where I was stationed in California. The sign provided the running total of the number of U.S. military personnel who had died in Vietnam during the war versus the number of U.S. citizens who had died on U.S. highways during the same period of time. The numbers weren't even close. The casualties on our highways were much higher.

Now, a new threat has risen to outpace traffic accidents as one of the top killers of Americans: [prescription drug](#) poisoning. According to an investigative article that appeared recently in the *Los Angeles Times*,<sup>1</sup> "drugs exceeded motor-vehicle accidents as a cause of death in 2009, killing at least 37,485 people nationwide." By comparison, the death toll for the Vietnam War is reported at 58,148 for the entire 10 years in which U.S. troops were deployed.

According to the article, pain meds and anti-anxiety drugs are the most deadly. OxyContin, Vicodin, Xanax, Soma and newcomer Fentanyl rank as the drugs that have taken the most lives. Every year, these drugs kill more people in the U.S. than heroin and cocaine combined.

What is most frightening is the aggressive trend the death tolls have taken in recent years. According to the authors of the *Times* article, between 2000 and 2008:

- "(Prescription) drug fatalities more than doubled among teens and young adults"
- "Deaths more than tripled among people aged 50 to 69"
- "(T)he death toll is highest among people in their 40s."

Not surprisingly, the prescription and dosage rates for these drugs are also increasing at an alarming rate. According to the [Times article](#), in California alone, the prescription rate for pain meds increased by 43 percent while the doses grew by 50 percent, a deadly combination.

Sadly, the majority of the people who overdosed on these prescription drugs were only looking to ease the pain in their body. Many probably believed they could live comfortable lives with regular dependence on their pain relievers.

Clearly, the chiropractic message was not being heard by these people. Many obviously chose regular drug ingestion over regular chiropractic care. I'm sure that a large percentage stopped looking for the cause and settled on what they believed was an acceptable "cure."

But this is not the end of this pharmaceutically-induced nightmare. In fact, it may only be the beginning. The current trend shows little signs of leveling off. We will certainly see even more deaths from prescription drugs once the 2010 and 2011 figures come out, and it is likely that the numbers will increase every year thereafter.

What can we do? Many have said that [Big Pharma](#) cannot be stopped. That may be true, but perhaps we can slow it down. If nothing else, maybe we can communicate a different message to

our communities. Perhaps we can educate our patients to appreciate just how dangerous prescription drugs really are and encourage them to tell their friends, family and co-workers to "try chiropractic first."

Go to the *Los Angeles Times* Web site, print out their investigative article and share it with your patients for the next few weeks. Ask them about the people they know who are living with pain by using prescription drugs to get through life. Ask them to talk to the people they love and encourage them to come see *you* instead. You may even want to offer a free exam to "see if chiropractic can help them with their pain."

Considering the millions of pain-medication users, even reaching a small percentage could make a real difference. Not only will we be improving health, but we will also be saving lives.

It took me about three hours to research and write this article. In that relatively short time, more than 13 people in the U.S. alone died of prescription drug poisoning. It didn't have to happen.

### *Reference*

1. "Drug Deaths Now Outnumber Traffic Fatalities in U.S., Data Show." *Los Angeles Times*. Sept. 17, 2011.
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