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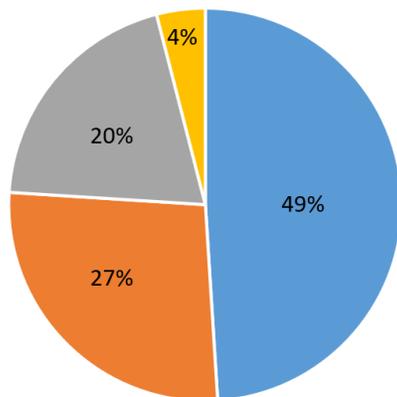
Characteristics of Gabapentin Misuse

Scientists from the Center for Applied Research on Substance Use and Health Disparities (ARSH) at Nova Southeastern University recently completed a National Institute on Drug Abuse-funded study of gabapentin misuse. Gabapentin is an anti-convulsant drug typically prescribed to treat epilepsy and neuralgia. It is also prescribed off-label for the treatment of mental health problems (e.g., anxiety), physical pain, as well as substance use disorders. Data from 2016 indicate that gabapentin was the 10th most prescribed medication in the U.S. At the same time, reports of gabapentin misuse are emerging, especially among individuals who misuse prescription opioids or use heroin. It is within this context that ARSH scientists conducted a local study of gabapentin misuse among 49 opioid users.

Findings indicate that 43% of participants misused gabapentin without ever receiving a prescription, and 14% misused it prior to receiving a prescription. This suggests that many are accessing and misusing gabapentin without a prescription. On average, participants misused 52 pills per month, primarily by swallowing a whole pill (86%); snorting (10%) and injecting (4%) were also reported. Although snorting and injecting are less common, they carry increased risk for HIV and Hepatitis C transmission if equipment is shared.

Substances commonly used in combination with gabapentin	
Any opioid	45%
Benzodiazepines	39%
Heroin	27%
Prescription opioids	25%
Alcohol	24%
Powder cocaine	22%
Marijuana	14%
Crack cocaine	12%

Source of Misused Gabapentin



■ Sharing / Trading ■ Prescriber
■ Dealer / Street buy ■ Theft

The majority of participants reported the misuse of gabapentin and another substance, most commonly prescription or illicit opioids. Negative consequences of gabapentin misuse can include seizures, as well as dependence and withdrawal symptoms. Misuse of gabapentin in conjunction with opioids is especially dangerous, and it is associated with hospitalization and overdose.

Based on the findings from this study, there appears to be an active street market for gabapentin. Although 20% of participants obtained gabapentin from prescribers, the remainder obtained gabapentin by sharing or trading with others (49%), street dealers (20%), or through theft (4%). Participants reported that gabapentin provided effects such as feelings reminiscent of alcohol intoxication, mild euphoria, pain relief, unpleasurable feelings, or no effect at all. Overall the results highlight the need for continued surveillance and increased prevention efforts, as well as screening for gabapentin misuse by healthcare providers.

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