

OxyContin® Dependence Rarely the Result of Legitimate Pain Management

*Study by TRI Investigators Lays Open the Popularly Held View that
Addiction to the Potent Pain Reliever is “Accidental,”
Primarily Striking the Drug “Naïve”*

*Findings derive from a Heavily Urban and Suburban Population Seeking Treatment in
Specialty-care, Substance Abuse Treatment Centers , Suggesting Broader Study is Needed*

November 2007: Doctors were not the source of OxyContin® supplies for the vast majority of patients tracked in a recent study, nor was OxyContin® the only or the first drug the patients used or became addicted to, according to an article by Deni Carise, Ph.D. appearing in the November issue of the *Journal of American Psychiatry*.

Although more study is needed, Carise’s findings may eventually contradict media reports – many built around celebrity arrests – suggesting that OxyContin® dependence primarily affects the drug “naïve” patient who accidentally develops an addiction or dependence after seeking medication from a doctor for legitimate pain problems. “Among treatment-seeking individuals who reported using OxyContin® in the sample we studied, the vast majority used it along with other drugs and obtained it from illicit – not medical – sources,” Carise said.

Carise and colleagues from the Treatment Research Institute looked at records from nearly 28,000 patients admitted to 157 public and privately funded, U.S. addiction treatment centers, mostly urban and suburban, between 2001 and 2004. Of the 1,425 patients who reported using OxyContin®, 78% reported the drug had not been prescribed for a medical reason, nearly 75% reported receiving prior substance abuse treatment, 92% acknowledged using OxyContin® in combination with other opioids, and 56% admitted they used the drug to “get high.” Only eight of the 1,425 patients said they had used no drug other than OxyContin® (other than alcohol).

Carise cautioned against broad conclusions until more data is studied. “Our sample derived from specialty-care, substance abuse treatment centers, not from private practice clinics or doctors’ offices,” she said. “Patients in these clinics may be vastly different in terms of socioeconomic status and support structures, and certainly do not resemble the celebrities whose addiction has been widely reported in the media. Also, our sample did not include adolescents, for whom prescription drug abuse is on the rise, nor were rural clinics well represented,” she said.

Another noted drug expert agreed. In a supplementary editorial appearing in the same *Journal* issue, Richard Rawson, Ph.D. from UCLA heralded the findings but supported the need for more studies to characterize the entire population of prescription drug abusers. Sound drug use data is essential, he argues, to ensure that policy making and informational campaigns are not “hijacked by stories of celebrity arrests and media generated hysteria.”