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Gap In Perceived and Actual Rates Of Prescription Stimulant Misuse, Abuse and Diversion Found Among College Students

- *Preliminary analysis of data shows association between non-medical use of prescription stimulants and other substance use*
- *Prescription stimulant misuse shown to be ineffective as study aid; no increase in grade point average or advantage over peers who abstained or desisted, according to separate survey*

(JULY 18) – A preliminary analysis of data from research conducted by the [University of Washington Center for the Study of Health & Risk Behaviors \(CSHRB\)](#) on behalf of [NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education](#) for the [Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse \(CPAMM\)](#) reveals a gap in perception and reality when it comes to prescription stimulant misuse, abuse and diversion on U.S. college campuses: most college students (83%) that participated in the survey reported abstaining from non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication. However, students estimate that nearly 30% of their peers are engaging in non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication when the actual reported rate of non-medical use of prescription stimulants is 17%.

The research, conducted through surveying 2,989 students at seven U.S. universities, will underpin student-focused prevention campaigns on campuses across the country. The research was conducted during the 2015-2016 academic year and led by [Jason Kilmer, Ph.D.](#), Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington School of Medicine and the Assistant Director of Health & Wellness for Alcohol and Other Drug Education in the Division of Student Life at the University of Washington.

“Dispelling the myth that ‘all students’ are using prescription stimulants non-medically is critically important when it comes to helping prevent students from considering non-medical use in the future,” says [David Arnold](#), Director, [BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA](#), a CPAMM partner. “We know that reinforcing the positive behaviors that most students are already engaging in through social norming messaging is an effective method in collegiate prevention, and that the role peer influence plays in student decision-making is significant. With the social norming campaign, an advertising campaign informed by this new research that will reinforce students’ positive behaviors, and the peer-to-peer programming, CPAMM will be bringing impactful tools to increase campus capacity and help prevent students from misusing stimulants.”

Additional research from the University of Maryland, led by [Amelia Arria, Ph.D.](#), Director, [Center on Young Adult Health and Development, School of Public Health and Principal Investigator on the College Life Study](#), further examined the non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication and its impact on student grade point averages (GPAs). [The research](#) tracked the GPAs of 898 college students longitudinally between academic year two and academic year three to determine whether or not non-medical use of prescription stimulants had an impact on academic performance. Dr. Arria’s research will further inform CPAMM’s prevention initiatives moving forward.

“The non-medical use of prescription stimulants is a serious concern for higher education administrators, and we recognize the role we play in helping to prevent it,” says [Kevin Kruger](#), President, [NASPA](#), a CPAMM partner. “Dr. Kilmer’s research shows that the primary reasons for misuse are related to academics, and gives us a guide to move forward, engaging the entire campus community in helping our students find ways to cope with stress and prevent misuse.”

Key findings from both studies will inform student-focused prevention programs to reinforce the positive habits most students have already developed including peer-to-peer programming and resources for the influencers in students’ lives. Notably, the preliminary analysis of Dr. Kilmer’s research data shows that:

- **For students, perception is not reality when it comes to misuse of prescription stimulant medication**

Most college students (83%) reported not using prescription stimulants non-medically. However, students estimated that nearly 30% of their peers were using stimulants non-medically when the actual reported rate was 17%.

- **Student’s motives for misusing are primarily related to academics, yet little or no academic benefit is associated with prescription stimulant misuse**

While the University of Washington research confirmed the primary reasons for using stimulant medications either without a prescription or in a way not prescribed are academic – specifically, to improve concentration while studying (54%), to study longer (53%), to feel less restless while studying (35%), to increase alertness (29%), to concentrate better in class (19%), to keep better track of assignments (14%), and to feel less restless in class (11%) – the additional research from the University of Maryland found that students who abstained from non-medical use of prescription stimulants had significant improvement in GPA, while students who engaged in non-medical use showed no increases in their GPAs and gained no advantage over both groups of their peers tracked in the study – those who abstained from non-medical use and those who desisted non-medical use between academic year two and three.

- **Non-medical use of prescription stimulants is associated with other substance use**

Almost all students (86%) who reported past year non-medical use of prescription stimulants also reported past year use of marijuana. Among students who reported past 30-day marijuana use, a high number (66%) reported non-medical use of prescription stimulants. Among students who reported non-medical use of stimulants in the past year, most (88% of females, 86% males) also reported heavy episodic drinking in the past 30 days (*defined as 4+ drinks for women and 5+ drinks for men at least once in the past 30 days*). In students who abstain from non-medical use of prescription stimulants, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking was nearly half that rate at 47% for both women and men.

“Future research can explore and help us consider ways in which non-medical use of prescription stimulants may relate to marijuana use, alcohol use, and other behaviors,” says Dr. Kilmer. “But, our preliminary analysis of the research data suggests that non-medical use of prescription stimulant medications is associated with a greater prevalence of marijuana use and heavy episodic drinking.”

Access Resources from the Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM)

For more information regarding CPAMM, or to access resources to help prevent prescription stimulant medication misuse, abuse and diversion, please visit www.CPAMM.org. Join the conversation online using #CPAMMorg.

About the Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM)

Founded in 2014, The Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM) strives to be a trusted source of information on the issue of ADHD prescription medication misuse, abuse and diversion – with a primary focus on college students. CPAMM will also use its knowledge to make a difference and prevent the nonmedical use of these medications. [Shire](#) is the sole funder of CPAMM, which includes the following partners: [American Academy of Family Physicians \(AAFP\)](#), [NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education](#), [BACCHUS Initiatives of NASPA](#), [Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or CHADD](#) and [The Jed Foundation \(JED\)](#). Other partner organizations do not provide financial contributions to CPAMM. On a case-by-case basis, partners may be compensated to execute research and programming proposals for expenses incurred, as approved by the Coalition. All partners, including Shire, voluntarily contribute to the Coalition through their areas of expertise. For more information, visit www.CPAMM.org.

University of Washington Research Methodology

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the research team at the University of Washington’s Center for the Study of Health & Risk Behaviors (CSHRB) conducted research on behalf of NASPA for CPAMM documenting the nonmedical use of prescription stimulant medication, as well as potential medical misuse, diversion, and attitudes. A sample of 2,989 undergraduates, including 217 with a reported past or current diagnoses of ADHD, between the ages of 18-25 (average age = 20.34 years) was collected.

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