

## Painkiller abuse in our nation at an all-time high

By Eleanor Coleman  
STAFF WRITER

The government's report "Epidemic: Responding to America's Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis" revealed that sales and prescriptions of painkillers have risen sharply in recent years. Because of this, the abuse of painkillers in the U.S. has increased rapidly and is linked to the recent increase in narcotic-related overdoses.

The report says that now the number of overdoses caused by prescription painkillers exceeds those caused by heroin and cocaine combined. This abuse is becoming very popular in our nation, and it has been identified as the "fastest growing drug problem facing the U.S.," according to The New York Times.

The noticeable increase in abusive behavior is due to the rise in both sales and prescriptions of painkillers. According to BBC, pharmaceutical companies are selling more of their drugs to doctors, and doctors are writing more prescriptions for them.

Some major pharmaceutical companies have been criticized for being too profit-oriented and dishonest in their sales efforts.

The case of Purdue Pharma is a good example. This company has been involved in numerous lawsuits for deceit in their marketing campaigns for the drug OxyContin, a brand of oxycodone. They have also been sued in a collective lawsuit in the state of Kentucky by some counties and cities.

"Purdue Pharma ... fraudulently claimed to doctors and patients that OxyContin, because it was long-acting, posed a reduced threat of abuse and addiction than traditional, shorter-acting narcotics," said The New York Times.

The fact that OxyContin is extended-release does not reduce the risk of abuse and addiction to the medicine.

To get a faster, more intense high, users will crush pills, then snort or swallow them or dissolve them in water and shoot up.

The company promoted this drug to doctors who lacked knowledge about the properties of OxyContin and weren't trained in pain treatment or to recognize drug abuse. This resulted in inappropriate prescriptions and has contributed to the addiction and abuse that so many Americans are involved with.

OxyContin is just one of many oxycodone-based painkillers. Others include Endocet, Percocet and Roxicet — and those are just the drugs containing oxycodone.

Other prescription painkillers contain hydrocodone, methadone, morphine and many more.

The Purdue case is just an example in a long list of painkiller brands that are also being pushed into doctors' offices, prescribed inappropriately, and sold illegally by those with prescriptions.

Painkillers are readily available and getting more and more popular, which is causing serious abuse problems in our country.

According to BBC, the Center for Disease Control's report said that deaths caused by prescription narcotics have tripled over the past ten years, which is equivalent to forty deaths a day.

An anonymous clinical supervisor at Guilford County's Drug and Alcohol Services said that, generally speaking, he has seen a sharp incline with abuse of prescription medications as opposed to using heroin.

"We're also seeing the ages of those using

prescription painkillers getting much, much younger," the supervisor said.

He noted that, although everyone is responsible for their own actions, in a way, people are being victimized.

"Recently, there has been a lot more treatment offered that uses painkiller medications," he said, suggesting that this rise was linked to more cases of addiction.

Guilford's director of student health, Helen Rice, is also aware of the severity of the problem.

"My understanding is that there is a huge problem with the overuse of painkillers," Rice said.

She pointed out that, since painkillers are so commonly prescribed by doctors, people tend to think that they aren't addictive.

Since painkillers are prescribed for severe and chronic pain, they are often prescribed for longer lengths of time. Because of this, users tend to build up a tolerance, which means they begin to need a higher dose. This can lead to addiction.

Sometimes taking them for severe pain can lead to addiction, but other times users initially use them for the high. Users can get them illegally if they can't get a prescription from their doctor.

"We do have students on campus who come to student health seeking painkillers for various reasons ... but we do not prescribe narcotic painkillers here," Rice said.

Direct prescription is by no means the only way to get a hold of these addictive drugs.

Through the robbing of pharmacies, the illegal selling of personal prescriptions and other illegal activities, users without a prescription are able to obtain prescription

painkillers.

All of this has called for stricter federal regulations in regards to the deceitful sales tactics of pharmaceutical companies, and emphasis has been placed upon educating health care providers and establishing treatment options.

An anonymous user explained to the Guilfordian that there were other efforts being brought into play to reduce the abuse of painkillers.

"The government is coming out with new prescription painkillers that are harder to abuse ... so I think that that will definitely reduce use, because what users really want is to snort and shoot them," the person said. "With the new pills being created, that won't be possible, and I think that will definitely frustrate users."

An article by Natasha Singer in The New York Times called "Taking the Fun Out of Popping Pain Pills" takes a look at some of these new pills.

"Some of these pills will be harder to crush, contain ingredients that cause unpleasant reactions if the pill is adulterated, or contain inner cores that, if tampered with, release drugs that counter the high of the pain reliever," Singer explained.

According to The New York Times, a new control program by the FDA will put stricter policies on distributing and prescribing prescription opiates. It will also educate health providers about safe use, so as to reduce inappropriate prescribing.

This, in turn, is hoped to decrease the availability of prescription painkillers and therefore reduce addiction, abuse and overdosing.

WQFS  
& JAZZY JOEL PRODUCTIONS PRESENT:

# Danny Brown

and RIMAR

November 19th Studio B 520 South Elm St. FREE Doors: 8pm

FAT SAND WHICH  
JAZZY JOEL PRODUCTIONS

## Greece looks to new PM for economic stability

By Karen Turner  
STAFF WRITER

Greece has undergone extreme economic and political turmoil ever since this past May. With a complete economic meltdown on the horizon, Greece has taken dramatic steps to prevent their closely looming bankruptcy.

On Nov. 11, Greece's Prime Minister George Papandreou agreed to resign halfway through his four-year term. After pushing for a referendum on the bailout agreement, fellow politicians and party opposition called for Papandreou's resignation. An interim coalition government was assembled, which will function until public elections are held on Feb. 19.

"I would like to wish every success to the new prime minister, and of course the new government," said Papandreou in his farewell address. "I will stand by them and I will support them with all my strength."

After several days of negotiation, former Vice President of the European Central Bank Lucas Papademos was declared Greece's new Prime Minister. He was officially sworn in on Nov. 11.

Papademos has had no time to become accustomed to his new position as prime minister, but nonetheless he must immediately start working to find the solution to Greece's massive economic problems.

A bailout agreement was already approved last month by the European Union for \$178 billion with a return rate of 50 cents for each borrowed euro, according to the BBC.

This hefty bailout could be Greece's salvation, but it comes with a steep cost. The government has

come up with a five-year plan that would implement austerity measures to reduce Greece's public spending while simultaneously increasing taxes.

These planned austerity measures contain a multitude of policies including everything from implementing new luxury taxes on pools to raising the retirement age from 55 to 65, reported the BBC.

Although the measures may be the only thing that will save the economy from complete crisis, the Greek population is not in favor of these measures, and thousands have shown their dissent in nationwide protests. Even though these measures are severe and unpopular, something has to be done before the Greek economy collapses into bankruptcy.

"Greece is at a juncture; both Papandreou and Papademos have seen the economic turmoil wrought by bank failures within Argentina as result of their unwillingness to pay back debt borrowed from abroad," said political science major Brian Jones, senior. "Neither of them wishes to see this happen in Greece, which is why the austerity measures that they are trying to pass are so devastating and encompassing. What they are trying to show their people is that they are working night and day to ensure political and economic stability within Greece."

The new coalition government is doing everything it can to ensure that Greece's economy does not completely pass the breaking point.

"Greece is at a crucial crossroads," said Papademos to the Guardian. "The choices that are made and the policies that are enforced will have a decisive impact on the wellbeing of Greeks. The way forward will not be easy but the problems can be solved, and will be solved, if there is unity, co-operation and consensus."