

# Bad Medicine

Stereotypes abound in today's society. It's all too tempting to throw aside the many things that people have in common with each other, and categorize them based on comparatively small differences.

This isn't helpful – not to those who may be discriminated against based on what are usually erroneous beliefs; not to those who may not realize they have a problem, because they don't fit the stereotype.

Drug abuse is a facet of mental health, which carries such a stereotype. The word 'drug' in this context tends to invoke sinister images of marijuana, heroin, P and other illegal substances.

Users of these illegal 'street' drugs are viewed by the law as criminals. Society often stigmatizes these people, based largely on their portrayal by the media. There is another face of drug abuse that is not as recognizable, but should be taken no less seriously.

The suppliers of these drugs do their work openly; there is no need for them to avoid the law because their products are legal. There is a degree of trust in these people and the things they dispense, which clandestine dealers couldn't hope to achieve; perhaps this increases the possible danger.

Prescription drug abuse is a very real problem. In many cases these products are more potent than what is available on the

street, and yet are often perceived as being safer. Modern medicine has done much good, but there is still a capacity for harm.

When one thinks about these drugs and the risks they present, celebrities are often the first people to come to mind.

Look no further than the recent case of Michael Jackson, and the physician found guilty of involuntary manslaughter after the star received a fatal overdose of medication.



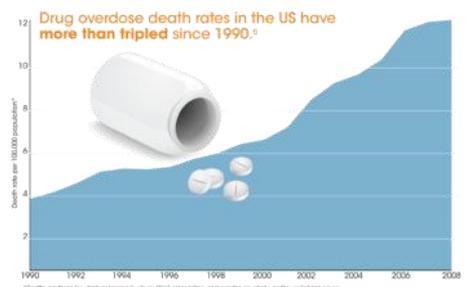
**Celebrity casualties of prescription drugs**  
clockwise from top left: Marilyn Monroe, Anna Nicole Smith, Michael Jackson, Heath Ledger

These deaths however, are just the tip of the iceberg. Sadly, when someone who does not live in the spotlight dies, they usually do so without fanfare. Outside of friends and family, the rest of the world does not mark their passing.

It is truly unfortunate then, that it takes the deaths of many 'average' people to gain the level of attention garnered by the loss of a select few. Their collective

fate, is more likely to be noticed by the statistician than the public at large.

It has been reported that prescription drug abuse is a growing problem in America. More people die from drug overdose there each year, mainly from the use of prescription medication, than in motor vehicle accidents. There were **at least 37,485** such deaths in 2009 alone.



Some victims are undoubtedly using these medications as an alternative to illegal drugs; others become addicted while using them to treat a real condition. The stories are as diverse as the people involved.

Our nation is smaller than America, and the statistics not as damning; the issue is still there. It is something that we should confront, before the statistics confront us.

A drug or alcohol problem could affect anyone, regardless of age or status. They don't discriminate, and neither should society.

How many of these lives could have been saved, had these people realized that asking for help is an act of courage, and not weakness?

Tony Spencer

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