TITLE: Prescription for Disaster
GRADE LEVELS: 9-12
CONTENT AREAS: Choose your path and Prepare for your path

STUDENT PATHS OUTCOMES:
2-2: Students develop awareness of their social system of support and constraints, and choose associations and behaviors that align with their values, goals and well-being.
3-1: Students prepare academically to transition to life after high school. This includes preparation for Common Core academic standards for reading.

IN THIS LESSON, STUDENTS WILL:
• Read “Prescription for Disaster” article from Student Paths.
• Write about their understanding of prescription drug use and abuse.
• Engage in large-group discussion of perceived benefits and risks of prescription drugs.
• Reflect upon healthy activities and supportive people in their lives, and identify resources and strategies to reduce likelihood of drug abuse.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED:
• American School Counselor Association Standard:
  PS:C1.8 – Learn about the emotional and physical dangers of substance use and abuse.
• Common Core State Standard:
  ELA-Literacy.RH.11012.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:
No Prior Knowledge is necessary, but the following websites will familiarize instructors with the issues around current prescription drug abuse.
Office of National Drug Control Policy briefing from the White House is used in this lesson:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/prescription-drug-abuse
Dr. Len Paulozzi of Brandeis University explains some of the indicators of the epidemic of prescription drug abuse:
http://www.pdpexcelence.org/drug-abuse-epidemic
National Institute on Drug Abuse shares 30-year trends in alcohol, tobacco, and drug use:
and details of prescription drug abuse:
Chart of commonly abused prescription drugs:
http://www.teenchallenge.org/site/c.inKLKROuHqE/b.5610351/k.113/Chart_of_Commonly_Abused_Prescription_Drugs.htm

LESSON PROCEDURE:
Read article (5 minutes)
Distribute Student Paths publication and instruct students to read article, “Prescription for Disaster.”

Large-Group Discussion about article(10 minutes):
The academic goal of discussion is to demonstrate for students how a critical reader considers sources and authority for the information in text. This lesson is also time for instructors to show students how to think critically about the risks of drug use and abuse. Allow 10 minutes to discuss the article so students may ask and answer questions within the larger group. The discussion may digress, but the primary question for every student to understand is: What is the source and credibility of the information presented?
To begin the discussion, draw student attention to the sidebar “Not a Smart Move” that quotes Dr. Alain Joffe, “We don’t really know what long-term effects these ADHD medications will have on the still-developing brains of adolescents who do not have ADHD. We do know they can have significant side effects, which is why they are limited to use with a prescription.”

First, ask the group to clarify what information is given to the reader: What does Dr. Joffe say? What does this mean? What are “long-term” and “significant side effects”?

Next, ask students to explain the meaning of “MD” and “MPH.” The conversation should begin with Doctor of Medicine and Master of Public Health and end with a critical understanding of what expertise these degrees entail.

Continue to ask critical questions that examine the authority of the source, Dr. Joffe, and challenge the students to understand fully what kind of expertise a doctor may gain from being: “Director, Student Health and Wellness Center at Johns Hopkins University” and “Former Chairman American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Substance Abuse.”

Why do you think the doctor does not know the long-term effects of medications?

Direct student attention to the article, “Prescription for Disaster,” and ask: What sources of information were used by the author to make claims about prescription drugs?

**Answers: Drugfree.org and Met Life.**

When Drugfree.org is mentioned, read this quote: “The mission of The Partnership at Drugfree.org is to help parents prevent, intervene in and find treatment for drug and alcohol use by their children.”

**Ask:** What kind of slant or bias could be present in any of this information?

**Answer:** Drugfree.org is likely to provide evidence of the dangers of drug use and advice for treatment. It may seem obvious, but remind students that another source, such as a pharmaceutical company might downplay negative effects of misuse.

When Met Life is mentioned, ask if students are familiar with Met Life, and remind them that it is a life insurance company. Many students may be unfamiliar with life insurance, investment management, and other employee benefits. Briefly introduce Met Life to pique student curiosity, and then ask: Why would Met Life be interested in the study of adolescent prescription drug abuse?

**Answer:** An actuary for Met Life would analyze the financial consequences of a risk, and use mathematics to predict the likelihood of future events. The cost a person pays for life insurance is determined by calculating risk factors that are more likely to lead to tragedy. Prescription drug abuse is a significant factor in accidental deaths and could be of interest for life insurance policies.

Segue from the point about high risk and recent increase of drug-induced deaths into a conversation about what public policy is doing to prevent the problem.

**Large-Group Critical Discussion about Briefing on Prescription Drug Abuse (10 minutes):**

If a projector is available, the White House has a succinct briefing on the prescription drug epidemic. See: http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/prescription-drug-abuse

Instruct students to take a few brief notes about drug control strategy. The instructor will share four primary points of the plan out loud for the large group to discuss further; students must take enough notes to understand the general plan to control prescription drug abuse.

**Read the following out loud with the large group:**

The Obama Administration’s Drug Control Strategy includes four areas to reduce drug abuse:

1. Education: Parents, youth, and prescribers need to know the dangers and proper use.
2. Monitoring: Implement Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs to reduce doctor shopping and data sharing between prescribers.
3. Medication Disposal Programs: Decrease the supply of unused prescription drugs.
4. Enforcement: Provide tools to eliminate illegal prescribing and stop pill mills.

Take time to answer questions, and check for student understanding by asking: What are the four strategic areas the federal government targets to control drugs?

Facilitate a general conversation about the regulation of prescription drugs. Allow students to share their opinions about what works to prevent drug abuse or allow a few crazy things they may have heard about drug abuse. Focus the attention of the group on strategies we use to prevent problems in society, and segue into the final part of the lesson. Students will write what they know about drug abuse and prevention.
Write Personal Strategies to Avoid Drug Abuse (5 minutes):

This final section of the lesson is for students to make a personal connection to strategies they may use to avoid problems with drugs. Instruct students to write freely on notebook paper everything they know about prescription drug abuse.

First, make this a challenge to see who knows the most about the problem, but there is no need for students to share what they write.

Second, ask students to write a few strategies that they use everyday to stay healthy and avoid drug problems. A few students may share answers that should include things such as staying active, maintaining positive friendships, and avoiding negative influences. Conclude the lesson by reminding students that we educate ourselves so that we better understand the problems in life and develop strategies to avoid problems all together.
Prescription for disaster — by Stephanie Murphey

Just because you can get it from a doctor doesn’t mean it can’t hurt you.

With all the activities available during high school and college, it is no wonder that students often feel stressed out and pressed for time – especially during finals. The pressures of performing well and getting work done come from parents, coaches, and teachers, while the pressures of going out and having fun come from friends. Unfortunately, more and more students are turning to prescription drugs to help cope with the stresses of school.

It might start simply enough: Caffeine pills to stay awake to write a paper or Vicodin to relieve a recurring tension headache. Though the use of such pills is fine when prescribed by a doctor or taken in moderation when the situation is warranted, the abuse of prescription pills can have damaging effects in all aspects of life, from medical to personal. Abuse of prescription drugs is not only unhealthy, but also illegal.

Prescription drug abuse up 33 percent among teens

The 2012 survey results released in April by the Partnership at Drugfree.org and MetLife Foundation show that one in four teens (25 percent) has misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their life, a 33 percent increase over the past five years. And one in eight teens (13 percent) reports that they have taken Ritalin or Adderall when it was not prescribed for them.

While abuse of prescription pain medicine still is unacceptable high, recent findings show it may be leveling off: Teen abuse of such drugs as Vicodin and OxyContin has remained stable since 2011, with one in six teens (16 percent) misusing at least once, and one in 10 teens (10 percent) admitting to abusing a prescription painkiller in the past year.

Consequences can be devastating

A drug is abused when it is taken for reasons other than its intended prescription and more often than prescribed. The effects of drug abuse are far-reaching. Four categories of commonly abused prescription drugs are tranquilizers, sedatives, stimulants, and pain relievers. Each drug type carries its own consequence. For example, stimulants not only affect mental health, causing paranoia, but also cause heart problems that could result in death, according to theantidrug.com.

Although users of prescription drugs may only intend to take the drugs once or twice, the addictive nature of these medicines may cause the habit to escalate. Addictions develop within the brain and cannot be stopped by simply wishing the problem away. Getting over a serious problem like addiction often requires the support of family, friends, and a doctor.

Seek help to end an addiction

The effects of addiction are not only personal but can damage others too. Common symptoms of addiction include depression, increased tolerance of the drug, feeling helpless without the drug, and destruction of relationships.

For those who are addicted, many helpful resources exist to break the habit. There are several Internet help services, and many schools have counselors or nurses onsite to assist with any problems.

These resources are also helpful to those who are having troubles with stress and thoughts of taking prescription drugs. No matter the problem, it is important to realize that nothing is worth risking health and legal troubles. Getting help doesn’t have to be embarrassing. There will always be people who will do their best to assist however they can to get a young life back on track.

Not a smart move: More teens are abusing Ritalin and Adderall

Abuse of the stimulants Ritalin and Adderall in particular appears to be driving the increases in teen medicine abuse.

Stimulants are a class of drugs that enhance brain activity and are commonly prescribed to treat health conditions including ADHD and obesity. But some teens and college students are abusing Ritalin and Adderall as study aids. Brigham Young University health science and computer science researchers recently did a six-month study monitoring Twitter and found that tweets about Adderall use peaked sharply during final exam periods.

According to 2012 data from the Partnership at Drugfree.org and MetLife Foundation, one in four teens believes that prescription drugs can be used as a study aid. And 9 percent of teens (about 1.9 million) report having misused or abused Ritalin or Adderall in the past year, up from 6 percent in 2008.

It is not safe or smart to abuse Ritalin or Adderall, both of which can have side effects. “We don’t really know what long-term effects these ADHD medications will have on the still-developing brains of adolescents who do not have ADHD. We do know they can have significant side effects, which is why they are limited to use with a prescription,” said Alain Joffe, MD, MPH, Director, Student Health and Wellness Center at Johns Hopkins University and Former Chairman, American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Substance Abuse.

Take medications only that are prescribed for you, and take them only as prescribed. Trying to gain an academic edge by abusing stimulants is not worth the risk.