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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Tools to Help Address Prescription Drug Abuse on Campus *Experts Engage College Students to Educate their Peers*

October 25, 2010, Rockville, MD – Although alcohol misuse and binge drinking still top the list of substance disorder issues on college campuses, the non-medical use of prescription medications – most notably pain relievers, stimulants, and sedatives – is a growing, serious and often unaddressed problem. A new resource kit available from the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE), in collaboration with the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), seeks to inform peer educators and campus student leaders and others about the dangers of prescription drug misuse/abuse prevention and treatment.

Taking Action to Prevent and Address Prescription Drug Abuse: A Resource Kit for College Campuses will help colleges and universities respond to prescription misuse and abuse problems which is pervasive. This resource was developed by NCPIE and SAMHSA in collaboration with representatives from a dozen nationally recognized professional, college health advocacy and substance use disorder prevention organizations.

“A growing number of college students are misusing/abusing prescription medications—the same ones found in medicine cabinets in homes across the country—not only to get high, but to self-medicate, to help succeed in school and to manage the stress of college life,” said Ray Bullman, executive vice president of NCPIE. “For many students, college is the first time that they have ventured away from home. They often find themselves up against tough decisions – one of which is standing up to pressures to do drugs and consume alcohol. This new kit will help to inform and mobilize college campuses and to raise awareness about and address the misuse and abuse of prescription medicines.”

The tools included in the resource kit are designed to provide peer educators and campus leaders, residence assistants, peer health educators, campus leaders in student government, Greek life or campus clubs, and captains of athletic teams among others – with timely and practical informational resources and program ideas to educate college students about prescription drug misuse/abuse prevention and treatment. The resource kit will also help students to learn skills so they can take action to prevent getting involved themselves or to even help a friend who may already be struggling with a problem.

Prescription medications, when used under a doctor's supervision, by the individual for whom they were prescribed and for what they were prescribed, are safe and effective in treating countless medical conditions. But when taking these medications for conditions other than what they were originally prescribed for, mixing them with other medications, or sharing them with individuals for whom they were not prescribed puts young lives at risk. Many students may not even realize that they, their roommate, teammate or friend are misusing/abusing these medications, many of which are controlled substances and, therefore, not only is it dangerous, but it is illegal to use medications without a prescription or share your prescription medication with others.

“Whether it's taking a friend's left over pain reliever to ease a nagging headache or backache or taking someone's prescription stimulant to pull an all-nighter before an exam, using medicines that were not prescribed for you and without medical oversight is very dangerous,” said Kenneth M. Hale, R.Ph., Ph.D., Assistant Dean, Professional & External Affairs, The Generation Rx Initiative, Ohio State University College of Pharmacy and member of the project advisory team. “There is a false sense of security that prescription medications are safer than illicit drugs because they are approved, regulated and prescribed by a doctor; however, when taken inappropriately or combined with alcohol and other substances, the results can be deadly.”

The inappropriate use of medications has also been linked to other high risk, unhealthy behaviors, according to studies. Many of these substances have synergistic effects. For example, prescription pain relievers and alcohol both slow breathing. By ingesting too much of both substances, someone can literally stop breathing. Despite the prevalence of the problem, early detection efforts to identify students at high risk fall short – less than one third of schools report doing any type of screening for prescription drug problems (NCASA, 2007).

Consider these facts:

- In 2009 among young adults, 6.3 percent used prescription-type drugs nonmedically in the past month (NSDUH, 2009).
- About one in four people aged 18 to 20 report using these medications nonmedically at least once in their lives (NSDUH, 2008).
- In 2008, a national estimate of 972,000 emergency department visits occurred involving the nonmedical use of prescription or over-the-counter pharmaceutical, or dietary supplements. Of this total, an estimated 71,000 visits occurred for persons 18 to 20 (SAMHSA's OAS. 2009).
- Students easily obtain prescription medicines on from friends or classmates or ordering them over the Internet (McCabe et al., 2005).
- By sophomore year, about half of students' classmates will have been offered the opportunity to abuse a prescription drug (Arria, 2008).
- Those who take prescription drugs for non-medical reasons are at least five times more likely to meet the definition of having a drug abuse problem than students who don't (McCabe, 2008).

More about the Resource Kit

The Resource Kit is purposely targeted toward student leaders – who were involved in its creation – because studies have shown peer-to-peer education helps to:

- Reduce high-risk behaviors
- Support healthy attitudes and behaviors
- Tell it like it really is (While prescription drug misuse and abuse on college campuses needs to be addressed, not everyone is doing it.)
- Cut through clutter and competing health information (peers listen to peers)

“College students themselves can play a powerful role in elevating awareness, educating students and changing behaviors around this growing health issue,” said Jessi Gibbons of Southern Virginia University, (American Student Government Association) and student representative on the project advisory team. “This new resource is an excellent tool to help educate college students about the negative impact of prescription drug abuse and the health and safety risks.”

Inside this kit, student leaders will find many ideas and tools to help spread the word – downloadable handouts, how to start a Facebook page, sample newspaper articles for publication in college papers, public service announcements for airing on campus stations, talking points and messaging on how to educate friends on medication safety tips, and tips and refusal skills for students who are prescribed medications that others students may want – how to say no, how to safely store their medications, and what to do if their medication is taken and much more.

Visit www.talkaboutrx.org to view and download the *Taking Action to Prevent and Address Prescription Drug Abuse* Resource Kit.

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NCPIE is solely responsible for the content, and maintains editorial control of all materials and publications produced.

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National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) is a nonprofit organization formed in 1982. NCPIE’s mission is to stimulate and improve communication of information on the safe and appropriate use of medicines to consumers and healthcare professionals. For more information, visit www.talkaboutrx.org.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Its mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America’s communities. Over the years SAMHSA has demonstrated that: *Prevention works, Treatment is effective, and People recover from mental and substance use disorders.* Behavioral health services improve health status and reduce health care and other costs to society. Continued improvement in the delivery and financing of prevention, treatment and recovery support services provides a cost effective opportunity to advance and protect the Nation's health. Please visit www.samhsa.gov for more information about SAMHSA’s programs and initiatives.