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Many U.S. Seniors Get Prescription Pain Pills From Multiple Doctors

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A new study found that about one-third of Medicare patients who get prescriptions (Rx) for painkillers receive them from multiple doctors, which raises their risk for hospitalization, *HealthDay* reports.

Prescriptions for painkillers have risen sharply in the United States over the past 20 years – as have overdoses from the powerful Rx pain medications.

These prescribed opiates include painkillers such as hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone (OxyContin) and morphine.

As part of the new study, researchers analyzed data from 1.8 million seniors enrolled in Medicare's prescription benefit (Part D) who filled at least one prescription for an opiate in 2010. Medicare is the federal taxpayer-supported insurance program for elderly in the U.S. Researchers noted they were surprised to find that 30 percent of elderly patients were prescribed narcotic painkillers by more than one doctor.

Study author Dr. Anupam Jena, an assistant professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School, and his colleagues found that having multiple doctors prescribe prescription painkillers increased senior patients' risk of being hospitalized for drug-related complications such as breathing problems, drowsiness and injuries from falls.

The greater the number of prescribers, the higher the risk of hospitalization, said study co-author Pinar Karaca-Mandic, an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. "Patients with four or more prescribers were twice as likely to be hospitalized for narcotics-related complications than patients receiving the same number of prescriptions from a single caregiver," said Karaca-Mandic.

Another recent report by the Institute of Medicine noted that substance abuse is a growing problem for older Americans.

To learn more about **Prescription Drugs**, please click here.