

Chapter 16

*H*ow to Balance Recovery and
Prescription Medications

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Remember that the cards you're dealt are less important than the way you play your hand.

-Nido Qubein

Medical procedures that require the use of mood-altering prescription medications pose a challenge to any person in Recovery. Do not go into these situations blindly. Although there are no hard and fast rules about what to do, let me suggest the following guidelines for you to follow:

Pathfinder's Checklist



What to do when you are being treated by a doctor for a medical complication.

- 1) Make sure your doctor knows about your addiction to alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Be informed about the dangers of any mood-altering prescription medication your doctor and you are considering for your use.
- 3) Let your sponsor know that you are considering taking mood-altering prescription medications.
- 4) Inform everyone in your Recovery support system that you are contemplating taking mood-altering prescription medication.
- 5) Medication should be taken exactly as prescribed by your doctor.

You ask, what's all the fuss? You say that alcohol is your drug of choice, not painkillers. Don't forget the phenomenon—cross addiction—that I discussed with you back in Chapter 2, *What is Chemical Dependency?* Because you have the disease of chemical dependency you

are powerless over *all* mood-altering substances—not just those you ingested.

So be sure your doctor knows that you're an alcohol and other drugs addict. But don't assume your job starts and ends with telling your doctor that you're in Recovery. **DO NOT ASSUME YOUR DOCTOR WON'T KNOWINGLY OR MISTAKENLY PRESCRIBE MEDICATIONS THAT MAY POTENTIALLY HARM YOUR RECOVERY!** It's your responsibility to be your own advocate. You must be informed about what medications your doctor is prescribing and the potential harm they may cause you. You must make the ultimate decision as to how solid your Recovery is for you to even consider taking any mood-altering medications. Get the message—do not assume that your doctor is as informed as he needs to be about your special needs. You and only you are responsible for what you put into your body.

The above guidelines apply to those situations when you have a choice about whether or not to take a particular mood-altering prescription medication. However, there may be times when you have no choice but to take prescription mood-altering medication. In such instances, you may want to consider the following guidelines:

- 1) Let people in your Recovery support system know that you will be taking mood-altering prescription medication.
- 2) Give the medication to someone you trust and let them give you the medication on whatever basis has been prescribed by your doctor.
- 3) Throw out, or have someone else throw out, any unused medication.

Another situation that may pose danger is when

friends and/or family members are taking prescription mood-altering substances. Because friends and family may not understand or sympathize with the special needs of a person addicted to alcohol and other drugs, they may not realize the temptation their medication poses to you. Again, it's your responsibility to keep your environment as safe as possible for you. It's your responsibility to educate the people in your life about your disease and the limitations it imposes on you. It's your responsibility not to use any and all mood-altering substances.

As with any other situation discussed in previous chapters, planning is key to taking care of yourself in potentially dangerous situations. Preventive measures as it pertains to the taking of mood-altering prescription medication is no less important. Hospitalizations, outpatient medical procedures, short-term, and long-term medication regimens require careful planning ahead of time.

Pathfinder's Checklist



What to plan for when being treated for a medical complication.

- 1) Let your doctor know from the beginning that you're a Recovering alcoholic and drug addict.
- 2) Inform your Recovery support system about your intention to take mood-altering prescription medication.
- 3) Have a member of your Recovery support system

with you when you enter the hospital for your procedure.

- 4) Be aware of the potential for euphoric recall once you take the mood-altering prescription medication.
- 5) No secrets. Process your experience of taking mood-altering prescription medication with your Recovery support system.
- 6) Have someone from your Recovery system take you home from the place you had your medical procedure performed.
- 7) Create a plan to stay with someone who can monitor your recovery from the medical procedures as well as any potential fall-out from having taken some mood-altering prescription medication.
- 8) Double your support group meetings for a few days after your medical procedure.

One area of controversy that you'll seldom if ever find agreement about is the use of anti-depressants and other medications to treat emotional disorders. More battles have been waged over this subject than during the Civil War. The fact is that most anti-depressant medications are not mood-altering nor addictive. At the same time, there are some medications used to treat emotional disorders that are harmful and addictive. You need to become your own advocate about this issue. Consider the following:

- 1) What is the potential harm to you and your Recovery if your emotional disorder goes untreated?
- 2) What are the risks to your Recovery if you use a specific medication for an underlying emotional disorder?
- 3) Are there alternatives to medication for treating your underlying emotional disorder?

- 4) Are those alternatives more effective, as effective, or less effective than available medications for your underlying emotional disorder?
- 5) Will the taking of medication for your underlying emotional disorder alienate you from your support system?

Keep in mind—this is your Recovery, this is your emotional well-being we're talking about, ultimately this is your responsibility. There are no bad choices here—only uninformed ones. Do the best you can to make the most informed choice you possibly can make!

The last area of concern we need to discuss is over-the-counter-medications. The fact that certain medications are sold over-the-counter does not make them any less dangerous to your Recovery. **YOU NEED TO BE AWARE OF THE CONTENTS OF ANY OVER-THE-COUNTNER MEDICATIONS AND OTHER PRODUCTS!** Some familiar products contain large quantities of alcohol or stimulants or other potentially dangerous chemicals. Again, it's on you.

- 1) You're responsible for knowing what's in any over-the-counter medication.
- 2) You're responsible for knowing what safe alternatives may be available to you.
- 3) You're responsible for knowing what is the appropriate amount to consume and the appropriate period of time to be consuming any over-the-counter medication or other product.

A good rule of thumb to practice is whenever possible go without. Don't act impulsively when you need not. Sometimes time is the safest most effective relief for common aches and pain!