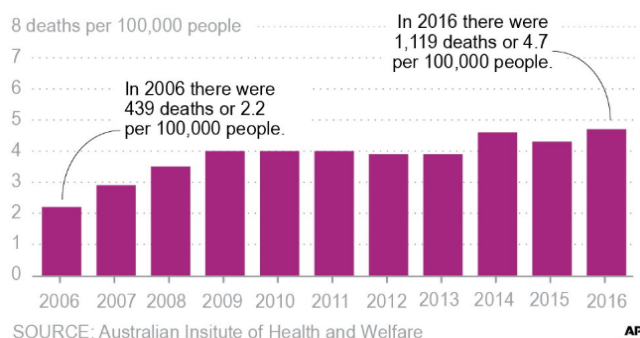


Greetings all. Today's Bulletin is about the dangers of Prescription Drugs.

When we talk about drugs in the workplace, we automatically assume that we are talking about illicit substances or recreational drugs. There are a lot of programs and ongoing efforts tackling this complex problem due to the high-risk nature of our work and consequences associated with drug affected workers. Cannabis, Methamphetamines and cocaine are not the only 'drug issue' we have.

Potentially, the drugs that endanger us the most, are 100% legal.

The Opioid Epidemic in the USA has claimed 47,000 lives in the last 12 months. In Australia the latest stats we have, show 1119 deaths in 2016.



Opioids were once reserved for treating pain that was short-term, terminal or related to cancer. But in the 1990s, pharmaceutical companies began aggressively marketing them for chronic pain. Starting in 2000, Australia began approving and subsidising certain opioids for use in chronic, non-cancer pain. Those approvals coincided with a spike in opioid consumption, which nearly quadrupled between 1990 and 2014. The critical element I'm highlighting is not only the rise in prescriptions but the associated misuse of these drugs. It's often an innocent mistake, post-surgery or battling a herniated disk and have just about finished your course of the 'real' pain killers and are transitioning back to plain paracetamol. You feel fine and in control, so you do the honourable thing and front up to work. The reality is, if those drugs are in your system you may be a danger to yourself and your colleagues. Every person reacts differently to these medications for a variety of reasons including genetics, diet, stress levels, sleep patterns and reaction with other medications. The most dangerous side effects

for someone conducting High Risk Work are reduced reaction times and lack of alertness/ability to concentrate. We have zero margin for error out on site and all the SWMS, safety procedures and PPE won't save you if your head is not in the right spot (so to speak)



You may recall Bulletin 233 where I showed that 50% of all C1,C2,C6 and CO licence holders are over 50 years old. The incidence of chronic pain is well documented in our aging population and with this comes prescriptions and pain management. Sitting in a crane all day can take its toll on the body as much as moving around with the hook. Long term dependency on pain relief is well documented to have adverse effects on psychological wellbeing among other things. We live in an age where 50% of all marriages break up. In Bulletin 244 we discussed the alarming facts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that last year 3128 people died in Australia from "intentional self-harm" rising 9.1% from the year before. Of these, 75% were male. Currently 1 in 5 Australians is using some form of antipsychotic drug, of which 80% were prescribed by GP's.

This Bulletin is not about me going after 'Big Pharma' or GP's and telling a bunch of workers to back off the pain meds and harden up. The key here is awareness. We need to stop and think about our medication and the work we do each day. We need to look out for each other and start the conversation if someone seems insufficiently alert. If one of your mates is not his usual self, and gets himself into trouble do you want to be the person who noticed but did nothing? Me neither.

Stay Safe -CICA