



UTAH BUSINESS HEALTH

Antidepressants flow freely in Utah as 1 in 5 women partakes

By Wendy Leonard | @wendyleonards | Sep 19, 2010, 10:19pm MDT

SALT LAKE CITY — More than 10 percent of all that Utah women spend at their local pharmacies goes toward purchasing antidepressants, and the most antidepressants are doled out in Roy, Hooper, Riverdale, Brigham City, Layton and southern Cache County. According to a report released this week by the Utah Department of Health, men in the 18-64 age group are spending half that, but overall, drugs to treat depression are second to pain meds in total sales in the state.

Key findings in the report indicate that in 2009, women were prescribed antidepressants more than twice often as males, and yet 12.71 percent of the state's total population is popping pills for depression on the recommendation of doctors.

The data comes from the legislative-funded All Payer Database, which houses commercial health care claims from insurance providers around the state. Claims from more than 900,000 Utah residents with commercial insurance were examined to provide a broad picture of antidepressant use in the state.

Antidepressant use among the age group 18-64 came in as the fourth most popular drug, under two categories of various pain medications and antibiotics. On the other hand, antidepressants are the second most expensive group of drugs. Medications that treat gastric ulcers and acid reflux are typically some of the most

expensive drugs available in out-patient pharmacies.

The study also found that one-third of all Utahns taking antidepressants in 2009 were also receiving medication for two significant chronic diseases, such as diabetes or hypertension. Officials say they'll be doing a more in-depth analysis to determine the relationship between chronic disease, depression and antidepressant use, according to Mark Gaskill, database project director.

Over 17 percent of people taking antidepressants were also taking medication for a single, yet minor chronic disease, such as migraines and minor hearing loss. The report found that the rate of antidepressant use rose significantly, more than doubling to 37.5 percent, with the emergence of multiple minor chronic diseases.

"It's extremely important that we do more research to understand how and why these drugs are used and the link with other chronic conditions," David Sundwall, director of the Utah Department of Health, said in a press release. With such high use rates, he said it is "incumbent on us to make sure they are being prescribed and used appropriately."

"Depression represents a significant public health issue that touches a large number of Utah families, and when left untreated, it can and does have a profound negative impact on quality of life and personal relationships," Sundwall said.

Depression is a serious public health issue, the report states, and its prevalence is widespread and the impact on individuals, families and the economy is significant. Experts and researchers have predicted that it will emerge as the second-leading cause of disability among developed nations over the next two decades.

"Health care reform in Utah requires that policymakers and health care providers have ready access to meaningful and valid data," said Rep. David Litvak, D-Salt Lake City, a member of the legislative Healthcare Reform Task Force. "This report represents the first of many and I anticipate they will help keep Utah out in front as reform efforts progress."

The department already has plans to study topics such as asthma, breast cancer and

coronary artery disease. A copy of the report regarding antidepressants can be found online at utahatlas.health.utah.gov.

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