

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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### PREPPING, ANOTHER CAUSE FOR DIVERSION OF OPIOIDS

Dear Editor:

A 65-year-old woman has been followed at our Pain Management Center for the past 6 years. She has a good increase in functionality on Percocet 5 mg, three times a day, as needed. For the past 6 years, her treatment has consisted of totally uneventful medical management of her Post-Laminectomy Pain Syndrome. A Health Plan Pharmacy surveillance report arrived at our office noting that the patient received a prescription of 12 tablets of Vicodin ES from another prescriber during the past 3 months. On questioning by the physician's assistant, the patient did not have a firm believable story as to why she had the prescription filled. Initially, the patient stated that the script was amongst the other script given to her by her dentist when she had a tooth extracted. Part way through her initial explanation the patient stated that "her sister" picked up all of her scripts for her from the dentist. This inconsistency led the physician's assistant to present the patient to me, her attending physician. I was perplexed as to why the patient would be lying to me. She otherwise had zero risk factors (Webster: Opioid Risk Tool) for opiate addiction or diversion. I asked the patient to be totally honest with me and I will try to be understanding. The patient then told me that she was a Prepper. I was not familiar with the term and asked her to elaborate. She stated that she met weekly with a group of similar-minded people who feel some type of economic, biologic, or social disaster is in the near future. She stated that a recurrent item brought up at meetings is the value and usefulness of medications. She stated that all members were encouraged to keep any unused medications for use during the "collapse."

Despite reality television's common misconceptions, Preppers are not crazy people dooming the end of the world or invasion of aliens. They are a group of individuals who share the common goal of being self-reliant.

Many of these individuals are professionals in today's workforce who are very determined and dedicated to fulfill their mission of preparedness. The term Prepper came about because these individuals are making preparations for a change that may occur in the future to daily living circumstances. They want to be self-sufficient and not have to rely on any assistance from outside sources, specifically the government. Preppers see the current financial situation deteriorating beyond repair and the global economy in crisis. However, inescapable circumstances do not just stop there and include the loss of a job or loved one and unforeseen natural disasters. These groups of individuals feel the only way to insulate themselves from the inevitable is to become contingent on ones' self or other group members. Preparations include stockpiling food, clothing, safety and medical supplies, and ammunition and firearms. Shelter is a big area of concern and many groups have safe havens, also called bug outs, located miles underground in desolate areas. It is not only important for them to have items and areas secure but also a plan must be in action for when the necessary time comes. They may not be able to foresee the future but they can be prepared for what is to come in regards to their safety, security, and survival.

The scarcity of medical supplies and medication is a colossal issue of concern among Preppers. Prescription medication is also the most difficult to obtain among items stored in bulk. Prepper survival guides advice people to have, at the minimum, a 3-month supply of medication. According a former Food and Drug Association compliance Chief, Joel Davis, prescription medication can be used up to 107 months past the expiration date, so the issue of effectiveness is not a fear. Recommended medications include antibiotics, antidiarrheals, opioids, and any medication that is taken by a person on a daily basis. Many people who have conditions that require daily doses agonize over the sustainability of their life during disasters due to the possibility of a very limited supply of medication. Preppers are using any means necessary to get their hands on prescriptions. Many have tried bringing their prescription card or even copies to multiple pharmacies to get them filled. If this does not work, they will even go to multiple providers with the same chief complaint in an effort to stockpile their daily medications. Refusal by insurance companies is inevitable if they catch on to a patient's tactics. At this point, the patient will have to incur out-of-pocket costs but many are willing to splurge now for the perceived benefits in

the future. Individuals are using online resources such as Pharmacy International in an effort to order prescription drugs. The authenticity of the drugs ordered and a person's safety are at huge risk. Some Preppers take it even a step further and travel as far as India, Egypt, Turkey, and Mexico in hopes of getting their hands on medication through physicians located within these countries because of their reputation for lenient prescription writing. The last place recommended to go during a disaster is a hospital setting, which is leading people to exhaust

all options in trying to acquire large amounts of narcotics. Pain medication can be used to treat physical injuries and used to perform amateur surgeries where anesthesia is not available after disasters occur. This inevitably leads to prescription medication being used inappropriately and exacerbates the existing epidemic of narcotic abuse and misuse in society today.

Frank A. Kunkel, MD  
Isabel Ahrendt

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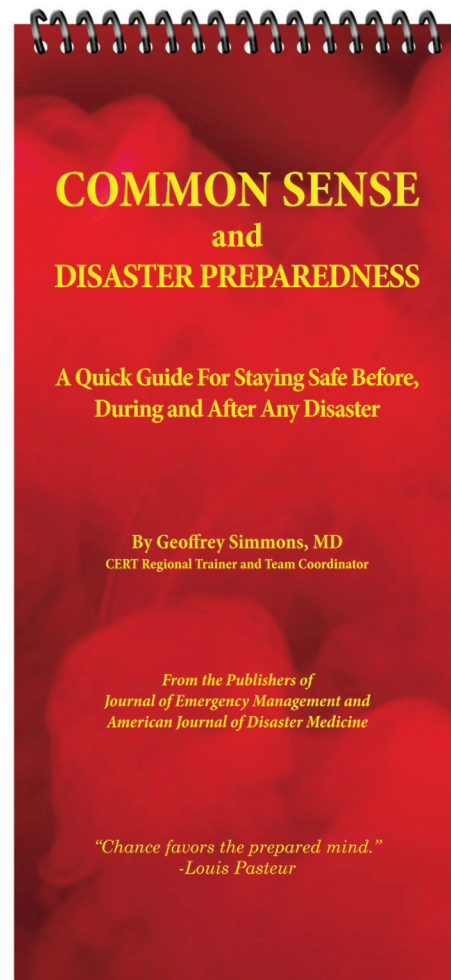
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