Use of Mental Health Meds Has Increased During COVID-19

Experts found that Americans filled more prescriptions for antidepressants, anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia drugs.

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The current coronavirus pandemic is causing mental health woes for many Americans. The number of individuals taking medications to relieve anxiety, depression and insomnia increased by 21% between February 16 and March 15, peaking during that last week when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, according to a new report from pharmacy benefit manager Express Scripts, reports FierceHealthcare.

Pharmacies experienced the biggest jump in the number of prescriptions filled for anxiety-inhibiting meds (34%), followed by antidepressants (19%) and anti-insomnia drugs (15%).

In addition, during that time, the use of antianxiety meds was found to be much higher among women (40%) than men (23%). (These drugs, classified as benzodiazepines, include Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan and Valium.)

This recent increase is a sharp contrast to the 12% decline in the use of benzodiazepines over the past five years.

Report findings also showed that antidepressant use increased by 15% in the last five years, especially among adult women, with teens ages 13 to 19 experiencing the biggest rise in usage of these meds at almost 38%.

“Americans have grown increasingly anxious as they’ve seen this global pandemic upend their lives within a very short time,” said Glen Stettin, MD, senior vice president and chief innovation officer at Express Scripts. “We’re all concerned about our health, our families and our livelihoods and are struggling with uncertainty.”

Stettin observed that the results indicating that people have turned to these medications signify the serious impact that COVID-19 is having on America’s mental health.

For related coverage, read “Feeling Anxiety About Coronavirus?” Also, take our “Dealing With COVID-19” survey and check out more coronavirus coverage.

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