

NEIGHBORS

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SOAPBOX

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ELDERLY ADDICTION A GROWING PROBLEM

In response to Georgia Tasker's article *The aging addict* (Tropical Life, Oct. 14), I would like to comment on two points: the misuse of self-prescribed drugs and the elderly population.

Fred Tasker and Connie Prater write in a different article in *Tropical Life*, "Consumers without medical insurance often are self-medicating, getting drugs from the Internet, via mail order."

These consumers may well be elderly patients unable to afford needed prescription drugs, and therefore depend on this black market.

What can one imply from this proliferation of self-medication?

There is a high probability of abuse that can later lead to dependency. According to Georgia Tasker's article, in two decades the number of older Americans with addiction problems has increased from 3 million to 8 million.

Many of these elderly addicts began taking medication and/or alcohol to relieve grief or depression, or to combat the fear of loneliness.

A life-changing event such as retirement or the death of a spouse triggers the full-blown addiction.

Moreover, my professional recommendation to family members is to be vigilant.

The onset of depression can very well be a sign of drug or alcohol abuse (a situation seldom identified during a

routine medical visit).

Consequently, elderly patients who visit a doctor for depression (usually a symptom of drug or alcohol addiction) are prescribed more medication, adding to the cycle of substance abuse.

Finally, Tasker writes "Many older adults live alone, so family members may not realize they are abusing alcohol or prescription drugs. Even when they become aware, they often don't know what to do."

This observation leads me to suggest to the medical community: Take steps to incorporate substance abuse evaluation during examinations. If a dependency problem is identified, a referral to a treatment facility or addiction therapist is warranted.

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We also reserve the right to edit for length and also to exclude any comments that may be libelous.

We will NOT publish your name if you don't want us to. However, please leave us your initials, the area where you live and a phone number or e-mail address to contact you.

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