

FDA's Antidepressant Warning Misses Mark

By Dan Stradford, President, Safe Harbor

Let's be honest: If you or I were as dependent on psychotropic drugs as America is, we'd be in rehab.

The FDA has finally proposed warning labels on antidepressants because they may promote suicidal tendencies - and we should be thankful. But isn't this just a small patch on a nasty wound?

In the early 1960s tranquilizers were introduced into the United States and were marketed so heavily that by 1968, Valium became the most prescribed drug in America. And the party hasn't stopped since. Didn't doctors know at the time that the drug was being abused and overprescribed, that it was addictive? Of course. Did they continue to prescribe it? Of course. Did the manufacturer continue to provide it? Need you ask?

Our society once had an old commonsense virtue that psychotropic drugs should be used as a last resort. Why? Because these drugs, while useful in extreme circumstances, can have nasty effects like addiction, rages, altered judgment, divorces, and yes, suicidal impulses. These "side effects" have been around for thousands of years, prompting most civilized groups to have prohibitions on mind-altering substances.

Yet, we have become so muddle-headed by the constant marketing to take these drugs for every emotional malady, that we now live in a ridiculous world where we have signs that say "This is a Drug-Free Zone" on the front of a school that is handing out tons of psychotropics to the children for depression, hyperactivity, anxiety, etc.

Psychiatric drugs have become a FIRST resort in America. That is the real nightmare the FDA should confront. Doctors no longer look for causes of depression, such as thyroid problems, lack of exercise, a bad diet, a guilty conscience, medical problems, allergies - the likely culprits could be many. By using drugs to treat the symptoms they not only expose patients to the effects of the drugs but they let the real causes go untreated. And by encouraging drug use to get over ordinary life experiences, such as a death in the family or teenage shyness, physicians numb the pain that so often contributes to maturity and emotional growth.

The FDA needs to step up to the plate: Psychiatric drugs as a LAST resort. What a concept.