The Internet made me do it but the Democrats helped

by Kerri Houston

I was advised in a recent spam email that I could â€œBea an NoRmal man/woman a viagru n sleep am-biann.â€•

Another online pharmacy wants me to â€œparty n lunstaa nor xanacksâ€• or treat Attention Deficit with â€œthe piackiup of best rittylin.â€•Whether I need lunstaa for insomnia, xanacks for addled nerves or viagru for erectile dysfunction (unlikely in my case), these drugs are easily purchased from Internet distributors who canâ€™t even spell the names of the drugs they are illegally peddling.

Despite the garbled nonsense of spammed missives, many Americans use these unlawful and unsafe channels to buy prescription drugs. And with Democrats now in control of Capitol Hill, chances of Americans taking substandard or fake medicines have increased considerably.

The dangers of Internet drug procurement cannot be over-stated. The industry is laden with criminals operating drug websites all over the world and distributing substandard or outright fake drugs without benefit of a physicianâ€™s prescription. The Internet allows the illicit consumption of medications in ways and in amounts not intended by either manufacturers or doctors.

Democrats have always supported legalizing â€œimportationâ€• of prescription drugs from foreign countries despite its demonstrable dangers. In testimony about the safety of online drug orders, Congress was provided with powerful evidence and real life cases of millions of fake pills seized by government agencies and security experts before reaching unsuspecting Americans.

But the knee-jerk hatred that Hill liberals have for Big Pharma has closed their minds to incontrovertible evidence of online drug dangers. In 2003, 155 Democrats -- including Speaker of the House and Majority-leader elect Pelosi and Hoyer -- voted to legalize importation and the spammers who want me to Bea NoRmal. Although drugs are developed for specific healthcare needs, there are always abusers who circumvent legitimate distribution channels and participate in non-therapeutic and criminal use of medication. Abuserâ€™s sensational stories create risk when they hit the front page and scare patients seeking treatment away from medicinal therapies. Illegal use of prescription sleep aids is the newest drug craze for reckless young adults. Several investigative reports across the country have revealed that college students (and adults) are ordering sleep medicines through the Internet and combining these sedatives with stimulant energy drinks

or other medications to produce a new kind of high.

They also force themselves to stay awake after taking sleep medications, artificially counteracting the intended effect of the drug. This confuses chemicals in the brain and can produce a hallucinatory experience.

Sleeping aids are specifically designed to be short acting, and directions instruct patients to take one pill, go directly to bed, and stay there for a minimum of eight hours. Yet in media reports of drivers arrested for erratic driving with sleep medication in their systems, these drivers admit to taking multiple pills before getting into their cars â€“- clearly not going to bed after taking them.

Drug abuse is the fault of the abuser, not of the drug, but lost in media coverage of illicit sleep aid use is any mention of personal responsibility. This problem is exacerbated by highly publicized stories like that of Representative Patrick Kennedy, D-RI -- who, ironically, voted â€œyesâ€• on Internet drug buys -- and blamed his Capital Hill vehicle accident last May on mixing the sleep aid Ambien with other medications, aptly demonstrating that operating vehicles or running with scissors after taking a sleeping pill is not a wise choice.

Montel Williams recently did a show on sleep aids, highlighting an abuser who admitted to pharmacy shopping and illegal online purchases, acknowledged an addictive personality, and confessed taking up to 90 pills a day. Miraculously, she stayed awake long enough to do the show.

Over 70 million Americans have problems sleeping, resulting in $50M in lost productivity and $16B in healthcare costs. Inadequate sleep can result in a myriad of health problems and a higher rate of industrial and automobile accidents. I know this well as I am a Fibromyalgia patient, and my nightly sleeping medication allows me to wake up after a full eight hours of sleep without the joint pain, muscle fatigue and â€œbrain fogâ€• that plagues Fibromyalgia sufferers. Media coverage focusing on illegal procurement and abuse of pharmaceuticals mischaracterizes the positive effects of legitimate medicines, ignores personal responsibility in irresponsible use, encourages criminal proliferation of dangerous drugs sold over the Internet, and in the example of sleep aids, may stop many sleep deprived Americans from seeking treatment.

Trial lawyers are already lining up at the sleeping pill pool, fishing for â€œvictimsâ€• and filing class action lawsuits. Although over 70% of medical liability plaintiffs received no settlements money at all, attorneys make billions, and sensational abuse stories attract business.

Americans should be able to depend on accurate, contextual information from a responsible media and not become victims of fear and smear attacks on the latest drug of choice for stylish drug abusers. If sensational stories and the attorneys who chase them separate 70 million Americans suffering from insomnia (or other diseases) from effective treatment accessed through legitimate channels, it will take a lot more than a piackiup of rittylin to make patients feel like a NoRmal (and healthy) man/woman.

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