



A recent Associated Press analysis has found that sales of the nation's two most popular prescription painkillers have exploded in new parts of the country. The analysis' finding is worrying experts who believe that this epidemic is as a result of a push by doctors to relieve patients' suffering.

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) data shows dramatic increases in the ten year period between 2000 and 2010 through the distribution of oxycodone, the key ingredient in OxyContin, Percocet and Percodan. The result: corresponding increases in overdose deaths, pharmacy robberies and other problems.

Findings reveal that enough oxycodone and hydrocodone have been dispensed to provide 40 5-mg Percocets and 24 5-mg Vicodins to every person in the United States. The increase is partly due to the aging U.S. population with pain issues and a greater willingness by doctors to treat pain.

Sales are also being driven by addiction, as users become physically dependent on painkillers and begin "doctor shopping" to keep the prescriptions coming, he said.

"Prescription medications can provide enormous health and quality-of-life benefits to patients," Gil Kerlikowske, the U.S. drug czar, told Congress in March. "However, we all now recognize that these drugs can be just as dangerous and deadly as illicit substances when misused or abused."

The AP analysis used drug data collected quarterly by the DEA's Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System. The DEA tracks shipments sent from distributors to pharmacies, hospitals, practitioners and teaching institutions and then compiles the data using three-digit ZIP codes. Every ZIP code starting with 100-, for example, is lumped together into one figure. The AP combined this data with census figures to determine effective sales per capita.

To read the rest of this story and see geographically-specific data, [click here](#).

NCADD offers a close look at the addiction issue at "[Addiction Medicine Update](#)". Come back often to check for the latest updates. To read NCADD's latest information about prescription drugs, [click here](#).