



D.A.R.E. Drugs Are Really Expensive!

The hidden costs of chronic pain medication

Dr. Christopher Gay, MD, eMBA | Interventional Pain Specialist | The Nervous Breakdown

Everyone remembers the anti-drug program from school. This is a different kind of D.A.R.E., aimed at the wallet, the liver, and sometimes the relationship a patient has with their own body.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Chronic pain medications carry financial, physical, and emotional costs beyond the copay.
- Combining lower medication doses with other treatments often beats escalating a single prescription.
- Rising costs or worsening side effects are a signal to revisit the plan with your physician.

THE FULL PICTURE

Chronic pain medications, especially when multiple drugs are combined over years, come with costs well beyond the pharmacy copay. There are direct financial costs: brand-name medications, prior authorization delays, and the endless cycle of appeals when insurance denies coverage.

There are physical costs: opioid tolerance requiring escalating doses, gastrointestinal damage from long-term anti-inflammatory use, and the sedation or cognitive fog that can come with certain combinations. There are also less visible costs, including the anxiety of running low on a prescription and the stigma many patients feel simply picking it up.

This does not mean medication has no place in pain management. It means medication works best as one part of a broader plan rather than the entire plan. Combining lower medication doses with interventional treatments, physical therapy, and nervous-system-focused strategies often produces better and cheaper long-term results.

If a medication regimen feels like it costs more than it gives back, whether that cost is measured in dollars, side effects, or peace of mind, that is worth raising directly with your physician. There are almost always other tools in the toolbox.

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace individualized medical advice. Discuss your specific diagnosis and treatment options with your physician.

The Nervous Breakdown • www.thenervousbreakdown.org • Alaska Center for Pain Relief