



After a decade of treating thousands of wounded troops, the military's medical system is awash in prescription drugs — and the results have sometimes been deadly.

By some estimates, well over 300,000 troops have returned from Iraq or Afghanistan with P.T.S.D., depression, traumatic brain injury or some combination of those. The Pentagon has looked to pharmacology to treat those complex problems, following the lead of civilian medicine. As a result, psychiatric drugs have been used more widely across the military than in any previous war.

But those medications, along with narcotic painkillers, are being increasingly linked to a rising tide of other problems, among them drug dependency, suicide and fatal accidents — sometimes from the interaction of the drugs themselves. An Army report on suicide released last year documented the problem, saying one-third of the force was on at least one prescription medication.

“Prescription drug use is on the rise,” the report said, noting that medications were involved in one-third of the record 162 suicides by active-duty soldiers in 2009. An additional 101 soldiers died accidentally from the toxic mixing of prescription drugs from 2006 to 2009.

“I’m not a doctor, but there is something inside that tells me the fewer of these things we prescribe, the better off we’ll be,” Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, the vice chief of staff of the Army who has led efforts on suicide, said in an interview.

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