

Calhoun looks at increasing medicine abuse trends

Efforts to address medicine abuse began in 2005 when the Substance Abuse Council, a county-wide drug prevention coalition, formed the Calhoun County `Medicine Abuse Prevention Task Force. Increasing problems are being seen nationwide with prescription and over-the-counter medication abuse. The 2005 and 2006 Monitoring the Future surveys report that while youth drug/alcohol use has decreased, the use of prescription drugs is one on the rise. The Partnership for a Drugfree America annual study shows one in five teens has abused prescription drugs with one in ten abusing cough medicine.

"The community spotlight is on when someone famous dies, has a child caught abusing or is on the cover of a tabloid as they enter a treatment program for their addiction. Abusing medications is the most unreported drug abuse problem in the nation. It may be the elephant in the living room everyone tiptoes around or pretends doesn't exist," states Jane Chappell, co-chair of the Medicine Abuse Prevention Task Force. Nuala Wilmanski, the other co-chair reports that "abuse may go undetected because use of medicines is legal and is highly promoted for the management of pain, stress, anxiety, and depression. We don't want people in pain to suffer; we just want to make sure they have enough information to prevent their own or someone else's abuse or addiction."

Information from current research and local sources tells us that:

- 4 million Americans today are addicted to prescription drugs
- teen use is increasing and they aren't realizing the dangers
- youth are engaging in "power raging" or using multiple drugs to get high usually without knowledge of or care for possible risks
- prescription drug abuse is becoming more of a problem amongst youth, females, and older adults
- people will sometimes sell their own or someone else's (a parent, grandparent, sibling) prescription medication lifting them right from family medicine cabinets
- drugs are being mixed, taken in quantities beyond that prescribed, and being shared or given away to others not under a doctor's care
- over the counter drugs are sometimes being shoplifted and sold illegally
- medications being misused in Calhoun County include cough syrups, Xanax, Coricidin, Benadryl, Vicodin, Oxycontin, and Ritalin
- youth and adults are sometimes faking injuries to obtain medications from emergency rooms
- an increase in the advertisement of medications can have both positive and negative consequences
- people are abusing to get high, to self medicate, for pain, for their weird/desired effects, for stress, weight control, or to commit suicide.

The most common use of medicines is for pain or anxiety relief. It is intended for short-term relief of a short-term problem. However, they are sometimes prescribed for chronic symptoms. Prescription drug addiction is no different than alcohol or any other drug addiction. Signs of a medicine abuse problem include: hiding pills, obsessively counting them, doctor shopping, or frequent visits to emergency rooms.

Parents, teachers, and community leaders are being urged to educate themselves and learn about medicine abuse. Preventing potential problems is best done by talking about the risks of misuse, the proper use of prescribed medications, addiction potential, alternative options to deal with physical and emotional issues, how to limit inappropriate access to youth, and safely dispose of medications.

For more information, contact the Substance Abuse Council: (269) 968 – 4699;
www.drugfreebc.org.