



Serving the Chippewa County Area

Summer 2008

NEWS AND NOTES FROM PATHWAYS

Prescription Drug Abuse

Prescription drugs can have great medical benefits when taken under the supervision of a physician. Although most people take prescription medications responsibly, there has been an increase in the nonmedical use/abuse of prescription drugs in the United States. This trend is disturbing in that it includes a continuum of the population from teenagers and young adults to the elderly and other segments of the population in between.

We live in an environment where medications are advertised on television. (*"Ask your doctor if this medication is right for you!"*) Medications can be ordered on-line "Sites advertising controlled prescription drugs increased by 135% from 1006 to 2007. Sites selling these drugs increased by seven percent in that same period time. Of the 187 sites found selling controlled prescription drugs in 2007, only two were certified by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy as Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites. 84% of these sites did not require a prescription, many simply asking that it be faxed." (1)

Locally, law enforcement groups report that the abuse of prescription medications is now the most common form of drug abuse in our area. The problem impacts all age groups in a variety of ways.

The General Population

- Medications not taken as directed by a physician or pharmacist.
- Medications taken with alcohol or inappropriately in combination with other medications, including over-the-counter drugs.

- Self-medicating or sharing with friends or family from one's "supply" in the medicine cabinet.
- Failure to report to a physician medications already being taken as prescribed by another physician.

Youth

- Experimenting with prescription or over-the-counter medications, seeking a new "high" or experience touted by their peers.
- "*Pharming*"... Grabbing a handful of pills and ingesting some or all of them, often mixed with alcohol.

Elderly

- Persons over 65 years of age are more likely to be using prescription medications - some on a long-term basis, and some with multiple prescriptions which could potentially result in unintentional misuse. Many of these are also using a variety of over-the-counter medications which are not always reported to their physicians and present a potential for adverse reactions.
- Some elderly persons may not ask their physicians for details on prescribed medications, or may become confused as to quantity and frequency of use.

Gender Differences

- While adult men and women have similar rates of prescription drug misuse, females are more frequently prescribed potentially addictive drugs.
- Adolescent females have higher rates of prescription drug misuse than adolescent males.

Access

The most blatant issue pertaining to Prescription Drug abuse is the fact that most homes have medicine cabinets (or drawers or shelves, etc.) In most cases, they are stored in a manner which does not limit access. Complicating this is the tendency to keep unused medications, thinking they might be needed at some future time. Theft of these “supplies” by a family member, visitor, or thief is sometimes not noticed until long after the medications are removed. Area schools report instances of pills brought to school and distributed to friends, sometimes for a price.

Criminal Activity: Area retailers report theft of cough medicines or other over-the-counter medications being stolen off their shelves by youth or sometimes by adults as well.

There have also been reports by home-owners of theft of medications from their homes, either by burglars or repairmen. This “loot” may either be used by the thief or sold/ traded on the street.

Physicians and pharmacies are faced with patients who “fake” symptoms looking for strong pain medications, or who falsify or adulterate prescriptions. All of the above behaviors are found in our area communities.

From a Pharmacist’s Perspective

Another perspective on this topic is provided by Paul Winger, Pharmacist at the Medicine Shoppe in Chippewa Falls.

“In my work as a pharmacist for over 20 years, I have seen first hand how drug addiction can adversely affect people. Prescription drug abuse is much harder to define than illegal drug abuse. Since a doctor is prescribing a drug people tend to think that means that it is “safe.” This is far from the truth. Prescription drugs can cause as much harm as illegal drugs. Families can be destroyed and lives can be ruined. Prescription drug abuse can range from a teenage boy who has knee surgery and becomes addicted to pain killers to an 80 year old woman who becomes dependent on sleeping pills. It can happen to people of all classes, races and creeds.

Once a person is addicted they will use any means to acquire the drugs they think they need. People will forge prescriptions, use multiple doctors and pharmacies and even steal medicine. (Including medication in your medicine cabinet if they can gain access.) I have experience with addicts I have seen them using any means to acquire drugs. A person who does not have an addiction to drugs does not

understand to what means a person will go who has an addiction. For this reason I worked collaboratively with the Chippewa County Drug Response Task Force in planning and implementing the “Rx: Save & Green Sweep” program. The fewer drugs that are sitting in someone’s medicine cabinet, the less chance someone has to gain access to them. I would encourage people to take the time to dispose of their unused medications in the proper way. Pharmacies can not legally take medications back and it is environmentally destructive to put many of the medications into our sewer systems.”

The Environment (2)

“Unwanted household pharmaceuticals and personal care products – things like prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and pet medications often end up getting flushed down your sink or thrown in the garbage can. But where do they go from there and why should you care?

The traditional ways of managing unwanted household pharmaceuticals, such as flushing them down the toilet and pouring them down the drain may be polluting our environment and threatening our health. According to a 1999-2000 U.S. Geological survey that looked at 139 streams in 30 states, 80% of those streams surveyed were found to be contaminated. Eighty-two contaminants were identified in those streams, including many pharmaceuticals.

Water quality can be negatively impacted when leftover medications are flushed or poured down the drain because wastewater treatment plants and septic systems don’t process them.

Household pharmaceuticals include expired or unwanted prescriptions or over-the-counter medicines; drugs that didn’t work for you, a family member, or pet; drugs that are no longer used; medicine from deceased family members, or unknown tablets, capsules, creams, or liquids.

As these substances get introduced into the water stream they can have an impact on aquatic life. Are there steps we can take to reduce *potentially* negative impacts on the environment and on ourselves? Yes.”

Citations

(1) National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

www.casacolumbia.org

(2) Excerpt from an article by Andrew Dane, Chippewa County UW-Extension

“Safe & Green Sweep”

On April 26th, the Chippewa County Drug Response Task Force collaborated with Chippewa County’s annual “Clean Sweep” event to provide residents with a means of disposing of old and unused medications. 198 individuals dropped off over 400 pounds of medications including controlled/ non-controlled pills, capsules and liquids, inhalation medications and topical medications. The Chippewa Falls Police Department took responsibility for “safe and green” disposal of the collected materials at a site in LaCrosse. This project was undertaken by the Task Force in response to the Prescription Drug Abuse problem. One objective was to call the public’s attention to the fact that the issue is a community problem which will require community-based solutions.



“Safe & Green Sweep” was a collaborative effort involving representatives from many segments of the community.

One result was the establishment of local Law Enforcement Jurisdictions as ongoing collection sites for unwanted medications in Chippewa County.

For more information, contact the following:

Bloomer Police Dept:

Chief Rick Carr – 568-5924

Cadott Police Dept:

Chief Louis Eslinger 289-4238

Chippewa Falls Police Dept:

Chief Wayne Nehring – 723-4424

Cornell Police Dept:

Chief John Barnier - 239-3707

Hallie Police Dept:

Chief Gale Haas - 726-2666

New Auburn Police Dept:

Marshal Lynn Perry – 237-3200

Stanley Police Dept:

Chief Roy Fredrickson – 644-5975

Chippewa County Sheriff’s Dept:

Sheriff Jim Kowalczyk – 726-7700

“Show & Tell”

“*Parents Give the Message*”. This is the slogan of a project to encourage parent-child communication about underage drinking. The project was developed in response to the exceptionally high rate of underage drinking in the western Wisconsin area – including Chippewa County. The project is being developed and implemented by the Youth Issues Committee, a sub-group of CHIP (Chippewa Health Improvement Partnership). The Youth Issues Committee consists of representatives from a number of agencies (including *Pathways*) who share concerns about the impact of community tolerance for underage use on youth and families. The “Show & Tell” initiative is being funded through a grant from the Community Foundation of Chippewa County. There will be a multi-faceted approach throughout the county with the goal of providing information for public awareness and information about effective parent-child communication.

Watch for this logo!



Our Mission Statement

Pathways promotes awareness and knowledge of the harmful consequences of misuse, abuse, and addiction to alcohol and other drugs, while developing and supporting comprehensive, community-based prevention services.



Our Staff:

<i>Executive Director</i>	Betty Kleemeier
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<i>Substance Abuse Counselor</i>	Traci Regis-Olson
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<i>Jail Program Educator</i>	List Geist
<i>AmeriCorps Member</i>	Ashley Schultz