

The Solution

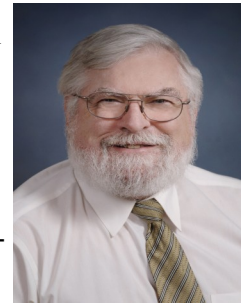


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Message From The Chair

I would like to wear my two professional hats for this newsletter message: chairperson of the Coalition and Professor of Criminal Justice. I have a dual interest in both the criminal aspect of drugs and its prevention/treatment. The drug-crime relationship is often ignored but we in Charlotte should be more attentive to it. Charlotte is considered a *regional distribution hub for most illicit drugs*. We are unique because of the interstate linkages of I-85/I-77. What needs to be openly addressed are the Mexican drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), the problem of Black-Tar Heroin and its surge among young white males in South Charlotte, as recently reported to the Coalition by a CMPD detective. But it goes beyond this and includes trafficking in cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana.



I have just completed another round of ADAM (Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) research in the Mecklenburg County jail. Astonishingly, after years of a low and stable amount of opiate use (Heroin, Oxycontin, etc.) – the proportion of arrestees (everyone arrested, not just those for drug offenses) testing positive increased substantially. Heroin use and availability appears to be growing elsewhere in North Carolina as well. It now crisscrosses the state and is present in every metropolitan area. Statistics indicate a 77 percent increase in heroin seizures in the last years (2007 – 2009). Mexican DTOs transport small consignments of Mexican brown and black tar heroin from the southwest border states to North Carolina using private and commercial vehicles and express parcel services. Other Hispanic, Asian, and African-American traffickers transport South American, Southeast Asian, and Southwest Asian heroin from Miami, New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia by private vehicles and networks of commercial bus and airline couriers - all coming into Charlotte. Out of sight – out of mind. But, it exists and we need to address the “demand” side. Law enforcement cannot stop the flow of drugs completely. Supply follows demand and the only way to control the problem of drugs in our community is to address demand. We need to begin to look more closely at the increased attractiveness of the use of opiates before they ruin more lives.

On the positive side, cocaine is less available in the state than it has been in previous years. Though seizures for 2008 increased, there was a noted decline in availability beginning in July, 2008. This phenomenon is due to the combined efforts of domestic and international law enforcement entities impeding the movement of cocaine through Mexico into the U.S. Because it has become increasingly difficult to transport cocaine into the U.S., some traffickers are supplementing their income by selling other drugs such as marijuana, MDMA (ecstasy) and prescription drugs.

Since I am highlighting law enforcement challenges, the illegal distribution and abuse of controlled pharmaceuticals is widespread throughout North Carolina. Their appeal is simply due to the relative ease of acquisition and use. The diversion of prescription opiates such as methadone, morphine, codeine, oxycodone and hydrocodone continues to be a problem, but we are not hearing much about it.

I do not want to sound “alarmist” but from a criminological perspective, the problem is far from solved. People, including kids, continue to demand drugs – all kinds of drugs- and it is **OUR** job to reduce that demand.

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Join the Solution...

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Weed or Succeed?

Written by Christopher Matthews



In this photo: Christopher Matthews
This picture was taken by Phillip Frances.

During the 2009-2010 school year, three Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools participated in a four stage marijuana prevention program that concluded with an in-school media campaign titled, *Weed or Succeed?* The first phase of the project involved the implementation of evidence based drug prevention curricula to students who are at risk for developing substance abuse problems. Students at two high schools received either *Project Toward No Drug Use* or *Keeping it Real*. The middle school curriculum used was *Project Alert*. The implementation of the curricula was facilitated by Christopher Matthews, a Prevention Specialist at The Anuvia Prevention & Recovery Center.

Immediately following the conclusion of the educational programs, the second phase of the project, a focus group with 6 to 8 students, was conducted. The second phase was designed to clarify local perceptions about best-practice messages, identify

media channels, and identify promotional items valued by youth who attend the schools.

The third phase involved collecting and analyzing the information from the focus groups. Mr. Matthews took the data he collected from these groups and worked with school clubs and organizations such as Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) and Tobacco Reality Unfiltered (TRU) to design the in-school media campaign *Weed or Succeed?* at the three schools.

The fourth phase was a weeklong *Weed or Succeed?* in-school media campaign designed to reduce teen approval ratings of drug use, and decrease the perception that marijuana use does not carry risks. The “Weed or Succeed?” campaign was comprised of daily activities, lectures, question & answer sessions, and prize giveaways during lunches. The prize giveaways were wristbands, water bottles, drawstring backpacks, and pencils. Each prize had a fact about marijuana written on it. Mr. Phillip Frances, a middle school guidance counselor at one of the participating schools said, “Not only was Chris able to positively impact nearly 600 students, as noted in the student feedback, but he also received the highest praise from our classroom teachers as well.”

Overall, 3,300 students in the three schools were directly impacted by the *Weed or Succeed?* media campaign. These students now understand that marijuana is not a safe alternative to tobacco, that using marijuana can lead to several negative legal consequences, and that marijuana contains a mind altering chemical called Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).



Black Tar Heroin, A Gathering Storm

Written by Kerry Burch

At a recent Drug Free Coalition meeting, Detective James Monroe talked to members about what he calls a “gathering storm”—the use of black tar heroin among youth in the Charlotte Mecklenburg region. Mainly controlled by the Mexican mafia, this heroin is more potent, more accessible, and less expensive than other types of heroin, making it particularly easy for youth to obtain and quite dangerous. Detective Monroe keeps an unofficial count of overdoses and deaths associated with this drug and has seen these numbers grow over the past four years. In 2007 there were roughly 5 overdoses and no deaths; in 2008 these numbers jumped to 12 and 3, respectively. 2009 saw a nearly four-fold increase in these numbers with roughly 44 overdoses and 12 deaths. Data from 11 of the twelve 2009 deaths reveal that those deaths involved two white females, one Hispanic male, five white males and three black males. Ages ranged from 21 to 56. The twenty-one year old was a white male. The average age of death was 40.6.



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Black tar heroin is known to cause powerful addiction among users but Detective Monroe also shared the other threats associated with this drug. Often users will mix this with other drugs to off-set the feelings of withdrawal which leads to more overdoses. It is not uncommon for youth to report performing CPR on their friends (or having it performed on themselves) when this occurs. Further, there are other health risks associated with the drug including exposure to botulism and flesh eating bacteria due to the fact that the heroin is produced in very remote and unsanitary environments.

To address these mounting concerns and prepare for this “gathering storm,” the Drug Free Coalition’s Parent Centered Prevention Committee is working to organize a town hall event. This event will be modeled after similar events focusing on alcohol and underage drinking. The purpose of these town hall events is to educate and engage parents and other community members in the prevention of substance use and abuse. For more information on the Parent Centered Prevention Committee, please visit www.drugfreecharlotte.org/committees.asp.

What’s your story?

Do you have any upcoming events or story ideas? Send your event information, pitch ideas, or share some pictures for the next edition of The Solution. Contact Kerry Burch at kerry.burch@carolinashealthcare.org

Underage Drinking: Local Policy Advocacy Training

Written by: Shelley Friedman

On May 8, 2010, Judge Ronald Bogle provided training on how to advocate for local policy change regarding underage drinking. This event demonstrated his passion for prevention and understanding of the enormity of the underage alcohol problem in our nation and in our state. He confirmed that national studies concur with our local data that show the “family home” is a primary source of alcohol acquisition by teens. Judge Bogle shared startling anecdotal stories about his time serving as a North Carolina judge and disclosed that the majority of sexual assaults, other crimes, accidents and deaths related to accidents involved alcohol use or abuse.

Studies show that most parents have little or no awareness of the alcohol consumption patterns of their children. Parents are the most influential people in the life of their child, and children want clear instruction from parents about alcohol use. Studies indicate that teen drinkers drink excessively, and drink for the sole purpose of achieving intoxication. The National Institutes of Health state that 53% of the identified alcoholics in America are young adults age 26 and younger. The vast majority began drinking as teens, most by age 15. The alcohol industry denies targeting youth with their alcohol ads. However, often a 4 year old can identify a Bud Light.

The training also included defining social host liabilities as parents and other adults being held accountable (or can be charged for) for parties held in their homes even without the adult serving or providing the alcohol. Additional forms of local tools, presented by Judge Bogle, to prevent underage drinking parties were the following types of ordinances: Noise or other Public Nuisance, Safety Plan, Landlord License and Law Enforcement Recovery Cost. Policy and enforcement of these types of ordinances are currently being shown as effective in reducing underage drinking parties.

Judge Bogle also shared information on human brain development. The adolescent brain, he said, is not fully developed, and won’t be fully developed until age 25. Alcohol has an especially negative effect on youth because when they do drink, many drink excessively. Therefore we need to get the message to our entire community that there is no reason for anyone under 21 years of age to use alcohol because it is an addictive drug that impacts an adolescent’s brain development.

As a result of this workshop, participants see a need to present this same training to the Coalition, staff and parents of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, physicians and other medical personnel, psychologists, social workers, law enforcement and clergy. We want to fight back against underage alcohol use and we need a more informed community to do so.



Judge Ronald Bogle

National CSAP Director Speaks About Prevention in North Carolina

Written by: Stephen Newman

In April, Fran Harding, the director of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), came to Raleigh to participate in the 6th Annual North Carolina Parents Network Conference. Ms. Harding became the director of CSAP in May of 2008. Prior to heading up CSAP, she was the Associate Commissioner of the Division of Prevention and Recovery of the New York state Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. She has also served as the president of the National Prevention Network (NPN), an organization representing all 50 states' alcohol and other drug prevention offices.

During the conference, she spoke at a breakfast with state and local substance abuse prevention leaders and other substance abuse professionals.

"It's an exciting time for prevention," Ms. Harding said as she began her presentation. "And what is North Carolina doing? It's doing everything that we in Washington expect you to be doing."

Ms. Harding told her audience that SAMHSA has identified ten strategic initiatives and that its first addresses the prevention of substance abuse and mental illness. The strategic initiative calls for the creation of "prevention-prepared communities where individuals, families, schools, workplaces and communities take action to promote emotional health and prevent and reduce mental illness, substance abuse including tobacco use, and suicide across the lifespan." Ms. Harding and CSAP are SAMHSA's agency leads for the initiative.

And the CSAP director suggested, specifically, that those in her audience read the current report on prevention of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine.

In the Executive Summary of that report, titled "Prevention for the Health of North Carolina," and published in October of 2009, the authors state, "The burden of chronic disease and other preventable conditions in our state is high and increasing steadily. National rankings show that North Carolina is 36th in terms of overall health and 38th in premature deaths... The most practical approach to address such conditions - both from a health and economic

perspective - is to prevent them from occurring in the first place. However, health care spending in North Carolina, as elsewhere in the country, is drastically skewed toward paying for therapeutic procedures to manage or treat acute or chronic health problems and *not* toward prevention. Reorienting our health system, as well as our overall society, towards a prevention focus represents a fundamental paradigm shift involving all members of our society."

"Focus on parents and underage drinking," Ms. Harding said as she concluded her remarks. "Speak to children as early as age eleven. And speak with them often."

Phil Mooring, the Executive Director of Families in Action and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Substance Abuse Prevention Providers Association stated, "We were thrilled to have Ms. Harding join us for the 6th Annual NC Parent Network Conference. Ms. Harding is recognized as one of the nation's leading experts in the field of drug and alcohol policy and her enthusiasm about the increasing importance of substance abuse prevention in the era of healthcare reform was just exhilarating."



Photo credit: Elizabeth Bunn

Phil Mooring; Executive Director, Families in Action; Chairman, Board of Director, North Carolina Substance Abuse Prevention Providers Association

Fran Harding; Director, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Dr. Janice Petersen; Project Administrator, North Carolina Prevention and Early Intervention, Community Policy Management Section, North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services

Flo Stein; Chief, Community Policy Management Section, North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services.