



HUNT INSIDER

Issue 5

April, 2008

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE CLIMBING AMONG TEENS

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of poisonings and even deaths associated with the abuse of prescription drugs among teens. More teens abuse prescription drugs than any illicit drug except marijuana. Pain relievers are the most commonly abused prescriptions, followed by depressants (sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs). Many of these prescription drugs are being obtained by the teens from family members or friends, and often without the knowledge of the prescribed patient. The unprescribed use of these drugs, especially in combination with other substances such as alcohol or other drugs, can lead to dangerous consequences, including death.

In 2006, more than 2.1 million teens abused prescription drugs, and 60% of teens who had abused prescription painkillers first tried them before age 15.

Some of the reasons teens give for using prescription drugs are, they believe that prescription painkillers are not addictive; they believe there are fewer side effects than street drugs; and they believe that there is nothing wrong with using prescription medicines without a prescription.

According to the Office of Drug Control Policy, parents can have a significant impact on curbing the supply by cutting off the access to prescription drugs in their home and by talking to their teen about the risks of drug abuse.

* The above information gleaned from "Prescription for Danger", a report dated January, 2008, by the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

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FEATURED BOARD MEMBER: TOM WEICHEL

Tom Weichel is the Alcona County Prosecuting Attorney, and loving husband of his wife Vicky, and father of four sons. He graduated from Alcona High School in 1979 and went on to receive an associates degree in Criminal Justice from Northwestern Michigan College, a bachelors of science degree from Ferris State University, and a Juris Doctorates degree from the Detroit College of Law.



Tom has dedicated his entire professional career to protecting children, families, and citizens of his community. He began as a juvenile probation officer, and then was a case worker with abused and neglected youth for Boysville of Michigan. He has since been a legal assistant for Rodnick and Unger p.c., a judicial assistant for the 26th Judicial Circuit Court, a business law instructor at Alpena Community College, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for Presque Isle County, and in 1993 was elected Prosecuting Attorney for Alcona County, where he remains today.

Tom's many accomplishments include assisting in the creation of Sunrise Centre, preparing the initial Community Corrections Grant for the 26th Judicial Circuit, the initial planning grant for Strong Families Safe Children, is a member of the Alcona County Human Services Counsel, Board of directors of Child and Family Services of North-east Michigan, a board member of the Alcona Elementary Health Extension, and is currently working to reform the criminal justice system in Alcona County, to include a new court process he initiated in 2005 called OWI/Drug Court program, which seeks to reduce substance abuse, crime, and recidivism, along with promoting public safety, individual responsibility, and citizenship.

Tom was chairman of the board of the Huron Undercover Narcotics Team from 1993 until 2005, and was recently re-elected to that position in September of 2007.

HUNT ANNUAL REPORT

The 2007 Huron Undercover Narcotics Team Annual Report has been completed. As the Annual Report reflects, 2007 was a noteworthy year, with new beginnings, new records, and significant accomplishments. The number of investigations initiated surpassed any year in the team's history, being up 35% over the average for the past ten years. The number of persons arrested also surpassed any in the team's history, being up 32% over the past ten year average.



The inclusion of other related criminal activity in our spectrum has taken the team to levels of service that the community will certainly benefit from. The team was able to assist other local law enforcement agencies in the investigations of violent criminal acts, stolen property, locating wanted criminals, and more. And, as anticipated, the majority of these other crimes did show a direct linkage to the drug community.

The report has been disseminated to the various governmental entities which have partnered with the team, and is available for public review on our web page, at www.huntteam.net.

BYRNE JAG GRANT

Approximately 21% of HUNT's annual funding comes from a federal grant called Byrne Justice Assistance Grant. The grant funds are appropriated under the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, Title VI (State and Local Narcotics Control and Justice Assistance Improvements). The program is named after New York City Police Officer Edward Byrne who was murdered by drug dealers. The funds are being utilized to supplement drug task forces, drug treatment courts and violent crime reduction efforts.

The Byrne JAG funds, which were \$520 million in 2007, are slated to be reduced to \$170.4 million for the fiscal year beginning in October of 2008, a 67% reduction. The Omnibus Appropriations Bill calling for the Byrne Jag reduction was approved by both the House and Senate, and was signed by President Bush on December 21, 2007.

HUNT's current Byrne JAG grant is \$165,000, which funds 50% of two officer positions, as well as a portion of the team's vehicle expense and a portion of the secretary salary. It has not been determined, how the decrease in funding will be allocated. It is anticipated that some programs will be completely eliminated, officers will be laid off, and others currently receiving funds will suffer a significant decrease.

Efforts are being made by state attorney generals nationwide as well as senators, representatives, and law enforcement officials to reverse the Byrne JAG cuts.

Featured Drug:

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Hydrocodone, the narcotic ingredient in Vicodin and Lortab, is a prescription drug, prescribed as a cough suppressant, and/or as a pain reliever for mild to moderate pain. It is a narcotic that can produce a calm, euphoric state. Pure Hydrocodone is a schedule II substance, and mixed with other non-narcotic ingredients to create Vicodin and Lortab, is a schedule III substance. Experts believe that an individual can become dependent on the drug in as little as one to four weeks at higher doses. Prescription Hydrocodone is commonly diverted through forged prescriptions, theft of family prescriptions, over-prescription, and "doctor shopping." The Drug Enforcement Administration believes Hydrocodone to be the most abused prescription drug in the country. Nationwide, its use has quadrupled in the last ten years, while emergency room visits attributed to Hydrocodone abuse increased 500 percent.



*The above information gleaned from Drug Addiction.com (www.drug-addiction.com/hydrocodone_addiction.htm)