



National Drug Facts Week

TARGETS YOUTH

Educating Teens About Drug Abuse is Crucial

BY CAROL KRAUSE, MA, CHIEF, NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE

Adolescence is the focus of drug-abuse education and prevention for several reasons. For one thing, addiction usually emerges in adolescence. Most people with diagnosed substance use disorders receive their diagnosis by age 20 and most begin taking drugs by age 18. Data show that the earlier they start, the greater the likelihood of developing a disorder, which is why we sometimes call addiction a developmental disease. In fact, its contributing risk factors may extend back even to childhood or the prenatal period.

Educating teens about drug abuse is crucial, not only because teens are more likely to take drugs but also because this age group is also more likely to be harmed by drug-taking and develop lasting problems as a result — problems beyond addiction. The harms range from the immediate dangers of risky activities like driving under the influence or unsafe sex to long-term impacts on cognition and memory, social functioning, and physical health.

The adolescent brain is uniquely vulnerable to being changed by substances, even permanently, because it is still undergoing major maturation processes that don't complete until the mid-20s. New study data from both animals and humans are filling out our picture of the kinds of changes that can occur as a result of drug use during development. Marijuana, for instance, is the most common illicit substance used by adolescents, and last year we learned from a major study in New Zealand that heavy use of this drug in the teen years can produce permanent impairment in intellectual ability. Heavy marijuana smokers who initiated their use as a teen lost an average of 8 IQ points that were not regained even if the individual had quit using in adulthood.

Unfortunately, a gradual loss of IQ points — or other known consequences of marijuana use like loss of motivation — are unlikely to be salient or no-

ticed by teens, either in themselves or in their peers who smoke marijuana, and thus it is hard to impress upon them the dangers of this drug. A diminishing number of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders perceive that occasional marijuana use may be harmful, a trend that parallels increased use of the drug by these age groups over the past several years.

Unfortunately, even drugs like prescription opioids that do frequently claim the lives of abusers are only perceived as dangerous (if taken occasionally) by just over half of high-school seniors. Some drugs' dangers are offset in teen perception by their supposed benefits. The increasingly abused ADHD drug Adderall is widely perceived by young people as enhancing cognitive performance, although it is quite dangerous when taken not as prescribed and research suggests it does not actually boost cognitive performance in those who don't have ADHD. The fact that doctors prescribe drugs like ADHD stimulants or pain relievers, and teens often see adults taking them, contributes to the perception of safety.

Research shows that when young people perceive drug abuse as harmful, they reduce their level of abuse. Clearly, reaching young people with effective messages that correct the myths about drugs' supposed benefits and lack of harms is urgently needed—particularly now as state-level marijuana policies shift and a bewildering array of dangerous new synthetic drugs flood the market masquerading as marijuana substitutes, sometimes evading legal controls.

One of the ways NIDA attempts to get sound messages across to youth is through National Drug Facts Week (NDFW), a national health observance during which science and health teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, drug prevention programs, and community support programs work together with parents and students to communicate the scientific facts about drug abuse. The wide array of

possible awareness events includes school assemblies, trivia nights, after school activities and panel discussions with local law enforcement, substance abuse counselors, and individuals affected by drug abuse. All events include the participation of a scientist or adult-supervised discussion of NIDA educational materials. During this week, our day-long Web chat (Drug Facts Chat Day) gives NIDA scientists the chance to directly answer thousands of questions from teens from nearly 100 high schools around the country.

More than 500 events are expected to be held in every state during this year's NDFW, January 27 through February 2, 2014. NIDA provides free materials designed exclusively for teens to planners of these events to help them disseminate sound, scientific information about drugs and drug use to teen participants.

Steering teenagers away from experimenting with drugs during this incredibly vulnerable crossroads in their development is worth whatever resources, time, and effort it takes, because it can prevent years of heartache and suffering—or worse—down the road. NIDA encourages NAADAC members to get involved with our NDFW efforts. We provide an online toolkit that provides useful information on how to create an event, publicize it, and obtain free materials to disseminate. Please visit our Web site for more information: <http://drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/> or e-mail our National Drug Facts Week team at drugfacts@nida.nih.gov.



Carol Krause, MA, serves as the Chief, Public Information and Liaison Branch in the Office of Science Policy and Communications at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction."

Institute of Addiction Awareness

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The Addiction Profession Loses Dr. David Powell

It is with deep sadness and pain that we write to tell you that David Powell, a dear friend of the addiction profession and colleague to many of us over the years, has unexpectedly died. There is no replacement for this expert and icon in the addiction profession, and we ask you to take a moment to mourn this dedicated and beautiful man. For many of us, Dr. David Powell was the person who took the text book of clinical supervision and made it into the real practice of clinical supervision. He mentored many, taught many and will be extremely missed by many.

A memorial service for Dr. Powell was held in Connecticut on November 23.

For those of you who would like to submit to NAADAC your thoughts, stories, pictures — we are honored to collect these and place them in a memorable booklet to give to his wife, Barbara, and his family. Please send your submissions to mstorie@naadac.org.

The NAADAC Executive Committee and staff of NAADAC will be discussing other means to memorialize this amazing professional. We are missing him already!

If you wish to connect with the family directly, Barbara Powell's email is barbarapowell@yahoo.com.