
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, September, 2012

The Mighty Oak Tree



I recently attended a presentation by Bertha Madras, PhD, an expert on the psychobiology of drug use.

She illustrated the vulnerability, complexity, elegance and interconnectedness of the adolescent brain by using an example from nature.

She said that if an oak tree gets a disease, the tree begins to “send” messages to other oak trees in the area about the risk of a threatening situation. As a response to this information, the other oak trees begin to manufacture chemical compounds to resist the disease. I think that is absolutely amazing.

Think about the 100 trillion supporting cells in a teenage brain and how they are adversely effected by using alcohol or other drugs before all of the tasks associated with neurodevelopment have been completed. Like the oak tree, the cells of a teenager’s brain are connected and what happens to one cell, impacts another in ways that scientists are just beginning to understand. Using alcohol, marijuana or other drugs during this critical phase can have lifelong implications for development that are becoming better understood.

Editor: Patricia Murphy Warble, LMSW, CPP

Marijuana As Medicine?

During a training at Student Assistance Services, a presentation was given by Bertha K. Madras, PhD, a professor of Psychobiology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School on issues related to marijuana as medicine. Dr. Madras is recognized as one of the leading experts in the country on drug addiction. The following is a synopsis of some of the points that she made during that talk and at a presentation given in cooperation with the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Dana Foundation in October, 2011, regarding the efficacy of marijuana as medicine.

Dr Madras began her presentation by saying that the ballot initiatives to approve a drug for medicinal use “circumvents 100 years’ worth of legislation that has tried to make the drug approval process evidence-based and scientifically based.” The Food and Drug Administration has stringent standards to protect Americans from fraudulent, dangerous, or ineffective drugs with an approval system that is among the most rigorous in the world.

She said that the approval of medical marijuana by legislative initiatives has had an adverse effect on drug use in this country. Youth drug use went down by 25 percent from 2002-2008 but since then the use of marijuana has increased and Dr. Madras feels that the two are connected. The legislative approval of allowing marijuana to be used for medical purposes has led to a lowering of the perception of risk among adolescents that marijuana is a potentially harmful drug and this had led to an increase in its use.

Next Dr. Madras discussed that there has been a campaign for over 50 years to raise awareness about the dangers of smoking. Yet, advocates for medical marijuana are saying that smoking is a legitimate and safe form of delivery of a complex mixture that has over 400 chemicals in it, even though there is sound evidence that smoking marijuana is harmful.

Dr. Madras went on to discuss the latest research about marijuana addiction and the danger that using marijuana poses for a young brain. She said that adolescents are far more vulnerable to drug addiction if they start the drug use during early adolescence. “The prevalence of

addition is five times higher for marijuana if young people start to use it before the age of 14 compared with initiation of use at the age of 18 or older.” If a child starts using before 14 the addiction rate is 28.1 %; if they start at ages 15 to 17 it is 18.6 %, and after 18, the rate drops to 7.4 %.

She also pointed out that after 6 to 12 months only 15% of the young people addicted to this drug can remain abstinent, so clearly, for some young people, marijuana is a highly addictive drug. In addition, Dr. Marcus said that 65 percent of the admissions to drug treatment centers is for marijuana.

In her opinion it is a critical public health initiative to do everything that can be done to prevent drug use among youth. As Dr. Madras said when she opened her talk, “To do nothing is unethical.”

Dr. Madras also pointed out that it is important to understand why the addiction rate of a young person is higher. Dr. Madras is currently researching whether or not marijuana produces effects during neurodevelopment that are different in the adolescent brain than in the adult brain.

The most recent research shows that the adolescent brain is not fully developed and undergoes “two global” changes. There are anatomical changes as the brain goes under extensive “pruning.” And during adolescence the brain uses different regions to respond to external stimuli. Since the adolescent brain is very different from an adult brain, it is possible that marijuana and other drugs

interfere with neurodevelopment in a way that increases the risk for addiction.

A week after Dr. Madras’ presentation a study was released which appears in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that showed that people who began smoking marijuana as teenagers and continued to use it heavily for decades lost a few I.Q. points along the way, while those who started in adulthood did not.

The findings, which tracked people’s habits from childhood through middle age, suggest that the developing teenage brain is especially vulnerable to drug use, the authors concluded.

“Adolescent-onset cannabis users showed significant I.Q. declines, and more persistent use was associated with greater declines,” said the lead author, Madeline H. Meier, a postdoctoral researcher at Duke University. “We know that there are developmental changes occurring in the teen years and up through the early 20s, and the brain may be especially vulnerable during this time,” Dr. Meier said.

As she finished her presentation, Dr. Madras reported that there is additional research being done on other ways that marijuana could be impacting teenagers. Some of the areas that are being considered are its impact on adolescent sexual development, schizophrenia, and fertility.

Related Concerns

Teens in Westchester County and other communities around this area report that they experience an incredible amount of stress in their daily lives. Most teens will identify the source of their stress as being related to trying to manage their time, do well academically and in other areas in order to get into a “good” college and in many cases, obtain a scholarship. To that end, teens report that they are stressed and anxious about succeeding academically, being an outstanding athlete, artist or performer, and in many cases, also trying to be popular and adhere to a very narrow definition of what makes a person attractive.

The teens feel that if they graduate from a “good” college, then they will get a good job and be financially secure. This pressure to succeed academically is so intense that it has led to cheating scandals in some of our finest educational institutions. Teens are willing to jeopardize their future by cheating.

Dealing with all of this stress and anxiety is another reason that marijuana has grown in popularity with this age group. One of the effects of marijuana use is that it makes a person calmer, less anxious and less stressed. It is understandable that this drug would become popular with a group of teens who are feeling so worried and frazzled about their performance and future. Unfortunately, the serious effects of using this drug offset any other “gains” that teenagers might erroneously feel that they are getting by using marijuana to “chill” for a period of time.

Another concern about marijuana is the availability of the drug in states that allow the sale of marijuana for “medical” reasons is that the drug becomes more available to teenagers. In these states, the youth rates are higher because young people have fake identifications and fake medical prescriptions which allows them to purchase it in a dispensary. In many cases, in medical marijuana dispensaries there are not rigorous protocols in place to check the authenticity of these documents.

Prevention First-NY

Community Underage Drinking Survey

Last year Student Assistance Services, after a very rigorous competition, was awarded a very prestigious grant that originated with Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration in cooperation with the NY State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. The primary focus of this grant is to educate parents about the dangers of underage alcohol use.

Prevention First-NY is a data driven initiative and in order to design effective projects that will have a positive impact on this serious issue, we first need to get information from parents about their attitudes and beliefs regarding the use of alcohol by teens.

So to that end, we are asking anyone who receives this newsletter to tell us your thoughts on underage drinking in your community among high school age youth (ages 14-19).

This survey is anonymous and the survey does not ask for your name or any other identifying information that can link your answers to you. You may choose not to answer a question and you may quit the survey at anytime. There are no right or wrong answers. Please go to <http://sgiz.mobi/s3/327c685ed3a8> or to the Q-code below to take the survey.



We are very grateful to all of you who participate in this important initiative. The information that is collected will help make all of Westchester County a safer place for everyone.

MedReturn Drug Collection Units



In response to growing concerns about the use of prescription drugs in Westchester County many communities have been participating in “Prescription Drug Take Back Days” that occur in the fall and spring. During the most recent one in April over 2,000 pounds of unwanted medications were collected at various sites throughout the county.

Now residents of the county will have another option. Several police chiefs throughout Westchester County responded to an offer made by the Westchester Coalition for Drug and Alcohol Free Youth to pay for MedReturn Drug Collection Units to be installed in their police headquarters.

The communities who responded will join others who already have the units installed in their local police departments. Overall there will now be ten of these units located conveniently throughout the county so everyone will have a

convenient place to dispose of medications.

Most of the units are located inside the door of the police department so it is very easy and convenient to put medications in the locked unit.

All the following communities will have the MedReturn Drug Collections Units available at their police departments to receive donations. These collection units accept unused, expired unwanted prescription medications, patches, ointments, and samples, plus vitamins, over-the-counter medications and pet medications.

- Bedford PD
- Briarcliff Manor PD
- Mt. Pleasant PD
- Mount Vernon PD
- Ossining PD
- Port Chester PD
- Pound Ridge PD
- Rye Brook PD
- White Plains PD
- Yorktown PD

Families Anonymous

Families Anonymous (FA) is a 12 Step Recovery Program for parents of children affected by alcohol and drugs or having other behavior problems. Whether a child is in recovery or not, FA will be a place for parents to share their experiences, strength and hope. The following is information about four groups that are currently meeting.

First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown, 2880 Crompond Road, Yorktown Heights
Mondays-7:30PM
914-420-3433 or 914-391-2509

St Barnabas Episcopal Church, 15 N. Broadway, Irvington
Wednesdays-7:30PM

St. Vincent's Hospital
275 North Street, Harrison
Wednesdays-7:30
914-255-5000

Rockland Council on Alcoholism, and Other Drug Dependence
25 Smith St, Nanuet
Mondays-7:30
845-300-2918 or 201-376-4560

Upcoming Events

October 23 6:30-9:15PM

Family Matters

Ossining

Anne M. Dorner Middle School

Contact: 329-2946

November 7 6:00-9:15PM

Katonah-Lewisboro Family U

John Jay Middle School

Simplicity Parenting

Kim John Payne

www.simplicityparenting.com

The Resilience Formula

Joel Haber, PhD

<http://respectu.com/>

Contact: 914-234-3227

November 15 6:00-9:15PM

Bedford Central Family U

Connecting With Your Child

Tara Brown

www.theconnectioncoach.org

If It's Not Your Kid, Whose Kid Is It?

Michael Nerney

Contact: 914-234-3227