



Cornerstone of Recovery partners with Metropolitan Drug Commission to provide community training for better understanding of Tennessee's prescription drug epidemic

To further address the need for understanding of the prescription drug epidemic in Tennessee, the Metropolitan Drug Commission and Cornerstone of Recovery hosted *Access to Danger: Perils in your medicine cabinet* on Nov. 14 at Cornerstone of Recovery.

Thousands of Tennesseans are affected by prescription drug abuse, which can take an enormous toll on productivity in the workforce and on the lives and families of people with this form of addiction. Objectives for the training included the extent of prescription drug abuse in Tennessee, understanding of the Tennessee Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, drug diversion in TennCare and how to identify the "doctor shopper."

Extent of the Problem

Tennessee has the highest use per capita for prescription drugs at 17.3 prescriptions, yet is ranked 47th in health status for its citizens. Regionally Knoxville ranks third for prescription use rates per resident with 11.9 per year. The top five drugs dispensed in Tennessee this past August were Hydrocodone, Ambien, Darvon, Lunesta and Oxycodone.

Consequences of Prescription Drug Abuse

It is evident that Tennesseans rely heavily upon prescription medications; however, prescription drug misuse and abuse can be costly. According to the 2006 Novartis Pharmacy Benefits Report, the prescription spending for Tennessee alone was \$7 billion in 2005, which equates to \$1,192 per capita with the national average at \$835.08. Spending is lowest in Hawaii at \$540.01 per capita.

Inappropriate use of prescription medications has the high potential for antibiotic resistance, adverse side effects, medication abuse, addiction, serious injury or death. **According to Bill Cecil, director of Health Policy Research at Blue Cross/Blue Shield, "Tennessee has a death rate from prescription drugs 43 percent higher than the national average."**

"Like alcohol, prescription drugs are available in the home and because they are legal substances, the perceived risk of using them is low compared to other illicit drugs," said Catherine Thatcher Brunson, executive director of the Metropolitan Drug Commission. "We are trying to inform parents that they too need to lock up their prescriptions."

Another concern is the potential for accidental poisoning caused by an incorrect dosage or unintended drug interaction with another medication or substance. Most

at risk are seniors over 65 years old, who according to a 2006 study by Medco Health Solutions, are at seven times greater risk for drug errors due to their multiple medications.

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In just four years, from 1999 to 2003, the Tennessee death rate from accidental drug poisoning by use of legal prescription and over-the-counter drugs doubled from 4.17 deaths per 100,000 to 8.46 deaths. Tennessee's accidental poisoning rate also stands 26 percent above the national average with cost estimates in 2006 tallying \$649 million, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Prescription for Change

Although Tennessee leads the nation in its use of prescription medications per capita, the state is not alone in facing the issue of prescription overuse.

Catherine Thatcher Brunson



(From L to R): Keynote speakers and panelists-- **Dr. Christopher Vinsant**, Medical Director, St. Mary's Pain Management Clinic; **Dr. Kevin Eidson**, Director, TN Board of Pharmacy; **William T. Cecil**, Director, Health Policy Research, BlueCross/BlueShield; **Dr. Nick Thornton**, Physician, Summit Medical Group; Knox County **District Attorney General Randy Nichols**; and **Agent Manny Tyndall**, Office of the Inspector General, TennCare.

Not pictured: **Dr. Bill Lee**, Cornerstone of Recovery.

The problem is one faced by many states. It is also an issue that goes beyond the individual to the responsibility of an entire system, and one that requires the collaboration of many entities to have a positive impact.

In Tennessee, changes are already underway to improve patient safety and reverse the prescription drug trend.

Dr. Kevin Eidson, director of the Tennessee Board of Pharmacy discussed a new program that allows practitioners to identify prescription drug trends and potential abusers. Physicians now have the opportunity to check up on a patient's history before writing them a prescription through a new mechanism called the Prescription Monitoring Portal (PMP). Should a patient be suspected of "doctor shopping," their physician can access the portal before a narcotic is prescribed. Although this new data collection portal was launched one year ago by the Tennessee Board of Pharmacy, just 1,450 practitioners currently use the program out of 30,000.

"The PMP has helped me tremendously to identify the people that are visiting multiple physicians or using drugs improperly," said Dr. Nick Thornton of Summit Medical Group. "It also helps me confirm and trust the people that are taking their medicines correctly."

All stakeholders—patients, providers and the health care community—must continue to collaboratively explore these mechanisms of change as they seek appropriate use for prescription drugs in Tennessee. Health information technology, public education and safety initiatives such as the PMP, have the potential to not only reduce the prescription drug epidemic in Tennessee, but also hold the promise of transforming the health care delivery system and saving millions of dollars.

For more information regarding prescription drug abuse, contact the Metropolitan Drug Commission at (865) 588-5550.

Knox County youth request student representation on the Board of Education

Members of the Knoxville/Knox County Mayors' Youth Action Council want a "Voice for Youth" in education and have proposed the addition of a youth representative on the Knox County Board of Education. On Dec. 17, high school students involved with the Youth Action Council (YAC) made their case at the school board's mid-month work session.

As proposed, a student school board member will be nonvoting, but will provide a student perspective during board discussions. This student member will also be a conduit for providing policy information to students through the Youth Action Council, Student Government Associations and other student based communication networks.

"After all, students are experts on how school policy actually affects their ability to learn and succeed in school,"

Meredith Whitfield

For YAC members, the creation of a student representative on the Board of Education is not only logical, but can be exceedingly beneficial. "After all, students are experts on how school policy actually affects their ability to learn and succeed in school," said Meredith Whitfield, senior at West High School and YAC member.

Several other school systems have already embraced the concept of involving youth as partners in educational decisions for the community. The Hamilton County School Board has had student representation since 2001. Meanwhile, the Tennessee Board of Education has had student representation since its inception in 1984 and the 2007-08 representative is from Knox County. If the school board approves the Youth Action Council proposal, rising senior students in Knox County Schools will be encouraged to apply for the new position in March 2008.

Representing 15 public and private high schools in Knox County, the YAC has often been called upon by the school board as well as the Knoxville Area Chamber Partnership and other organizations to provide student opinions on critical issues in our community. The Youth Action Council works to promote young people as resources for community problem solving, while engaging youth in community service and local government.

For more information about the YAC or about the proposal to add a student representative to the Knox County School Board, contact Anne Haston or Leah Adinolfi at (865) 588-5550.

Drug use one of ten largest racial and ethnic health disparities

In a recent submission to the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report identifying the ten largest racial and ethnic health disparities in the United States. Drug-induced death rates were among the largest health disparities for four out of the five racial and ethnic groups (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and White non-Hispanic) and were the only indicator shared by both Black and White non-Hispanic populations (shown in Figure 1 below).

Other leading racial and ethnic health disparities were fetal alcohol syndrome (American Indian or Alaska Native), smoking by pregnant women (White non-Hispanic and American Indian or Alaska Native), alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths (American Indian or Alaska Native), and binge drinking among high school seniors (White non-Hispanic) *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2007; 166(1):97-103.

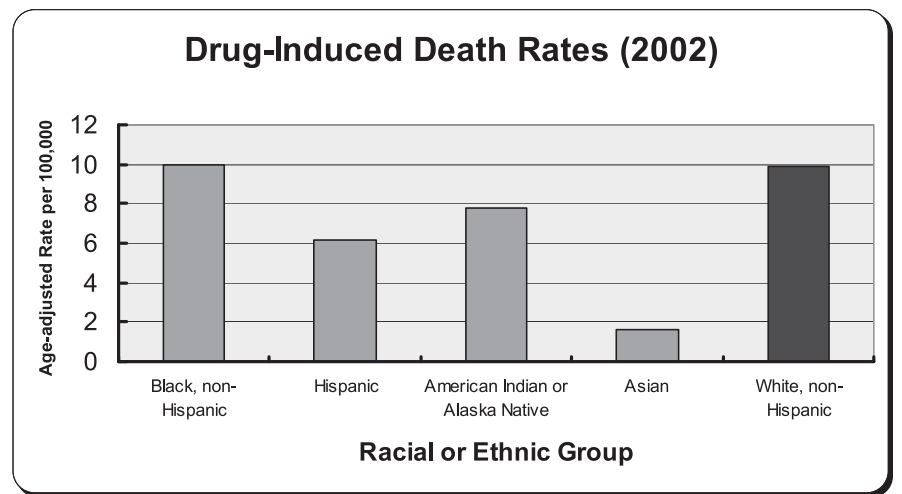


Figure 1: Age-Adjusted, Drug-induced Death Rates (2002): *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2007; 166(1):97-103.

Youth Summit 2008! Register now at www.metrodrug.org

Mark your calendars for the 2008 Knoxville Youth Summit planned for April 5, 2008 at West High School. The Youth Summit is Knoxville's premier event for youth, by youth.

Local high school students coordinate the event and facilitate the day's activities so that youth leave empowered to change their communities. Students will have a chance to gain community service credits through a variety of service activities.

****School clubs, youth serving non-profit organizations and church youth groups are encouraged to make plans now for their group to attend this day long event.****

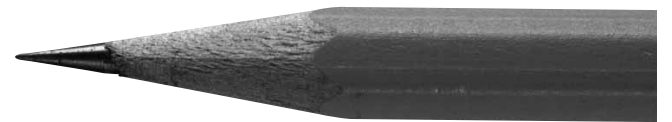
Contact Leah Adinolfi at the Metropolitan Drug Commission (865) 588-5550 or email ladinolfi@bellsouth.net for more information.

Test your alcohol I.Q.

The American Medical Association recently commissioned a survey to find out what kids have to say about where they accessed alcohol for their own use. Eight out of ten in the survey said alcohol was easy to get at a party. After that, what was the main source?

- (A) Parents (with or without their permission)
- (B) At a licensed establishment using a Fake I.D.
- (C) Relatives (a brother or sister who is over 21)

In the AMA survey, underage drinkers said they found it easy to obtain alcohol from an adult, particularly at parties. More than one-fourth of



the teens said they had attended a party where kids consumed alcohol with parents present. Almost one-third of the teens said it was easy to get alcohol from their parents with their parents' knowledge.

Parents may not understand the toll of underage drinking. Research shows underage drinking plays a large part in teen crime, violence, sexual activity and accidents. Underage drinking can lead to addiction or other substance abuse, affect school performance and even damage the developing brain.

The correct response is (A).

Fulton and Powell PRIDE Teams wrap up successful fall semester

It's been yet another successful finish of the fall semester for the Metropolitan Drug Commission's PRIDE Teams at Fulton and Powell High Schools. Over 100 hours of community service were performed by students from each of the drug free clubs.

In just three months, both teams hosted a membership drive, attended an eight hour intensive drug education training, volunteered at the Baptist Turkey Trot and raised money through a Secret Santa cookie sale to help fund a trip to the 31st Annual World Drug Prevention Conference next April in Cincinnati.

In addition, the Fulton PRIDE Team sponsored the second annual drug-free poster contest, spoke at the Kiwanis Club of Downtown's November meeting and collected alcohol advertising data from local off premise outlets along Broadway. The team is in the process of a positive marketing campaign aimed at businesses located near their school and neighborhoods. In January 2008, the team will revisit these businesses and ask them to post counter-ads aimed to discourage adults from purchasing alcohol for minors.

The new PRIDE Team at Powell High School made a great first impression on students and staff as well. Members of PRIDE Team passed out over 500 pieces of alcohol and other drug-related literature to 9th graders at a drug-free assembly and decorated holiday cards for residents of Hillcrest North. During their time at Hillcrest, the members also sang Christmas carols and passed out candy.

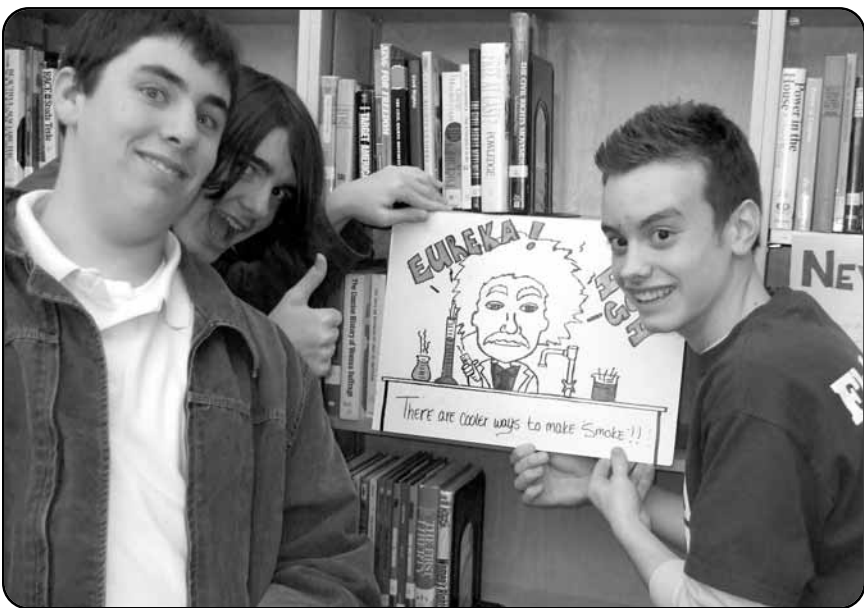
Over and over again, research shows that when organizations provide access to positive youth alternative activities, young people are less likely to engage in risky behaviors like underage drinking, drug use, etc. If you would like to get involved with the PRIDE Teams or would like to make a donation to their World Drug Prevention Conference fund, please contact the Metropolitan Drug Commission at (865) 588-5550.



The MDC's Fulton and Powell PRIDE Teams braved the cold at the 2007 Baptist Turkey Trot where they volunteered in the Children's Activities area.



Powell PRIDE Team members made holiday cards, sang Christmas carols and delivered candy to residents of Hillcrest North.



Members of the Fulton PRIDE Team hang posters in the school library for the second annual Drug-Free poster contest.



PRIDE members spent an in-service day at Fulton High School in order to attend a team training provided by PRIDE International.

Special thanks to the following contributors of the Metropolitan Drug Commission's first Internet Auction!



AAA of East Tennessee
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Make a difference!

Join our membership campaign to find out how you can support local youth programming and initiatives. Log on to www.metrodrug.org and click the Membership Brochure link to find out how you can become a partner of the MDC. For more information, call (865) 588-5550.

MDC in Action

From Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2007, the MDC serviced the community by providing:

400	Treatment Referrals
2,081	Prevention Materials & Resources
1,688,834	Website Hits

Jean Drive to benefit Richard Yoakley School

Middle and high school students at Richard Yoakley (RYS) are in need of new or gently used blue jeans. Jeans can be dropped off at the Metropolitan Drug Commission (5908 Lyons View Pike, Cedar Cottage in Lakeshore Park). Questions? Call (865) 588-5550.

Register now for the 2008 Yes2Kids Conference March 3-4 in Franklin, TN

Yes2Kids is a professional development and networking conference for adults who serve Tennessee youth. From educational sessions to networking, intensive-training workshops to inspiring keynote speakers, the 2008 conference helps you meet your professional development needs. Conference sessions cover current and upcoming challenges, innovative and best practices, school and community issues. Questions? Call Lisa Greene at (615) 279-0058 or email her at lgreene@studentstakingaighstand.org.

Get involved!

The Drug Free Community Coalition meets from 12-1 p.m. on the 4th Tuesday of every other month at the Knox County Health Department Community Room (140 Dameron Ave, Knoxville, TN 37917.) If you would like to join our efforts, contact Leah Adinolfi at (865) 588-5550 ladinolfi@bellsouth.net. The 2008 meeting dates are:

January 22	May 27	September 23
March 25	July 22	November 25

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To submit an announcement or article to the Metropolitan Drug Commission's **ALERT**, please call (865) 588-5550.

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Visit OUR WEBSITE for information about starting or maintaining a Drug-free Workplace Program; parent resources; treatment options; general drug descriptions, including warning signs and effects; and local and national research about drug use.

www.metrodrug.org

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