

## What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us

By Jane Smith, XYZ Coalition Prevention Coordinator

As parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and other concerned adults, we spend a lot of time helping teens circumvent the challenges that could ruin their lives. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges teens face is substance abuse. We talk to them about the hazards of underage alcohol use, binge drinking, drunk and drugged driving, and the risks of abusing marijuana and other dangerous drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. According to national statistics, we're making an impact.

According to The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)—a national study conducted each year by the U.S. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration—showed that overall illicit drug use among youth aged 12-17—from 2002 to 2008—has declined. *Monitoring the Future*—another noteworthy survey conducted yearly by the University of Michigan also substantiates a gradual decline. That's great news, but only tells part of the story.

What has not seen a decline is the nonmedical use of prescription medications. Prescription drug abuse has affected media personalities from Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland to more recently, Michael Jackson, Anna Nicole Smith, Heath Ledger, Brian "Crush" Adams (professional wrestler) and Ken Caminiti (1996 Most Valuable Player—played for Houston Astros, San Diego Padres and the Atlanta Braves).

Out of the spotlight are the teens who are abusing these drugs to get high, fall asleep, wake up and deal with stress. Did you know that one in five teens or 4.5 million young people have abused Rx drugs, and every day, almost 2,500 teens abuse an Rx medication for the first time (National Council on Patient Information and Education)? The Office of National Drug Control Policy says that the drugs most commonly abused by teens are painkillers; depressants, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and stimulants, mainly

prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Local statistics indicate that

[place local information here].

Teens find Rx medication abuse as an acceptable and safer alternative to illicit drug use, second only to marijuana. Why—perhaps because we live in a world where there's a pill for everything. In fact, when we go to the doctor, in seven out of 10 visits we leave with a prescription. It's no wonder that teens are comfortable with misusing and abusing Rx medications. They also believe that because these drugs are legal, they are safer than marijuana, heroin, cocaine or methamphetamine.

Prescription drugs are easy to get. Fifty-six percent of people who use Rx medications non-medically say they obtain these drugs from friends and relatives (NSDUH 2008), meaning that these drugs are freely shared or taken from medicine cabinets or other accessible places.

So how do we protect the rights of those who need these medications to relieve pain while also preventing their abuse? We've got to sound the alarm to parents and adult caregivers that prescription drugs *are* a source of grave concern. Teens are abusing these drugs and some are even dying because of it. Parents can protect their teens by locking up their meds, keeping track of medication quantities and learning how to properly dispose of medications when they are no longer needed. Contact [Coalition contact information] to become part of the teen Rx abuse solution.

Jane Smith is the Prevention Coordinator for XYZ Coalition—Silver Spring, MD. Ms. Smith has served as the Coalition's Prevention Coordinator for the past 10 years, specializing in youth issues. She is also the proud mother of two teenagers—a son and daughter—a gymnast and an actress.

## What We Don't Know Can Hurt Us

By Jane Smith, XYZ Coalition Prevention Coordinator

As parents, relatives, teachers and concerned adults, we spend a lot of time helping teens circumvent the challenges that could ruin their lives. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges is substance abuse. We talk to them about the hazards of underage alcohol use and the problems associated with abusing marijuana and other dangerous drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. According to national statistics, we're making progress, with most illicit drug use going down over time.

A drug category that requires our attention is prescription medications. The fact is that one in five teens or 4.5 million young people have abused Rx drugs (National Council on Patient Information and Education). They are abusing these medications to get high, fall asleep, wake up and deal with stress. Local statistics indicate that \_\_\_\_\_ [place local information here].

Teens believe that because Rx medications are legal, they are safer than their illicit counterparts, making these medications the statistical drug of choice after marijuana. Prescription drugs are also easy to get. Fifty-six percent of people who use Rx medications non-medically say they obtain these drugs from friends and relatives (NSDUH 2008), meaning that these drugs are freely shared or taken from medicine cabinets or other accessible places.

How do we protect the rights of those who need these medications to relieve pain, while also preventing their abuse? We've got to sound the alarm to parents and adult caregivers that prescription drugs *are* a source of grave concern. Teens are abusing these drugs and some are even dying because of it. Adults need to lock up their meds, keep track of their medication quantities and learn how to properly dispose of unused medications. Be a part of the solution. Contact \_\_\_\_\_ [Coalition contact information].

*Jane Smith is the Prevention Coordinator for XYZ Coalition—Silver Spring, MD. Ms. Smith has served as the Coalition's Prevention Coordinator for the past 10 years, specializing in youth issues. She is also the proud mother of two teenagers—a son and daughter—a gymnast and an actress.*