

Drug council official stresses drug habit dangers at Kiwanis event

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Using scare tactics to get cocaine users to stop the habit does not work, says Richard McDonald, educational assistant for the Council on Drug Abuse.

McDonald spoke about the effects of cocaine on first-round draft pick Len Bias and Cleveland Browns defensive back Leon Rogers at a Greater Winston Kiwanis meeting at the Hyatt House last week.

"These deaths of two well-known athletes will make people think, but after the issue dies down in the media, the whole thing will be forgotten," McDonald said. "Addiction among pro athletes is not new, it's just come up in the media recently because of their deaths."

McDonald said he estimates that the chemically addictive drug, which has been used for thousands of years, has 5,000 new users every day.

Today's cocaine is of a higher purity, sells in larger amounts and is more available than ever before.

Contrary to previous stereotypes, cocaine is no longer a drug for the rich, white-collar worker. "Cocaine doesn't have economic, social or racial boundaries anymore," McDonald said. "Some of your local factory workers can afford it now. It doesn't matter what status you are."

An imitation of cocaine called "crack," a relatively new drug on the scene, is available at a much cheaper price and sold in "ready-to-use" bags for \$10 to \$30. Although its use is not as prevalent in the Winston-Salem area as in cities such as New York, an increase in the use of this more addictive drug is said to be expected in this area because of its inexpensiveness.

According to statistics from the Council on Drug Abuse, about 20 percent of school-age students have tried crack; 6 or 7 percent are regular users.

"People once saw cocaine as 'psychologically addictive.' Since then, we have found that it is more than that; it's a powerful, reinforcing drug," McDonald said.

Forsyth Memorial issues sickle cell update

Sickle cell anemia first became known as a health problem 70 years ago, and in the time since, doctors have learned how the disease is inherited, how to detect it and how to treat the health problems it causes. No one has yet found a cure, however.

Researchers are looking for a drug or chemical that can prevent red blood cells from sickling -- the process associated with the disease.

In some people, the red blood cells can alter from their normal round shape to an abnormal sickle shape.

When the tendency for this condition is inherited from one parent, the offspring has sickle cell trait, a condition affecting one in 12 black Americans. When the tendency is inherited from both parents, the individual has sickle cell anemia, which hits one in every 500 black Americans.

Because of the sickle-shaped red cells in their blood, people who have the disease experience unpredictable pain attacks, caused when the cells plug the blood vessels.

The disease can also bring on other serious health problems, such as stroke or retinitis.

But the notion that most sickle cell anemia victims do not live into adulthood is an outdated one. With ongoing medical care and counseling, most people with the disease can lead satisfying lives.

A traditional treatment program encompasses diet, physical activity and medications such as antibiotics, since the disease makes it hard for a child to fight infection.

Researchers are also looking at radically new and experimental treatments like the sickle cell Please see page A12

"The chemicals in these drugs are known to destroy human relationships in general," he said. "When people are under the influence of these drugs, they sometimes lose a lot of their morals and lose all concern for their family and friends."

McDonald said that during the 1960s, when drug use increased, some people began stealing television sets and anything else to get the money to support their

habits. "It has to be powerful if it makes people do things they would not normally do," he said.

He also said that there are different steps which lead to addiction. Addiction begins with experimenting. Next follows use, misuse, abuse and addiction.

Referring to Bias, McDonald said, "He was evidently an experimenter, a first-time user."

Whether or not cocaine is a constant high is debatable. "At the start of usage, it gives a high,

but once the drug's effects die down, depression sets in," McDonald said. "And this depression is at a much greater level than normal depression. You've been up on this high for so long that when you come down, you don't come down to where you started from; you go below that level to make up for the high."

There are also no known safe levels of cocaine. Each person has a different tolerance to the

drug. What may be enough for a high for one person may be potent enough to kill another.

McDonald said that strong family bonds can sometimes keep a person from drug use or abuse.

"We also need to look at how we adults use or misuse chemicals," he said. "You need to think, 'What kind of example am I setting for my kid when I sit at the kitchen table in the morning with my coffee and a cigarette, or when I come home

from work and the first thing I do is grab a beer?'"

The council is a federally funded organization under confidential laws which provides prevention education in school systems, deals with people who abuse drugs, and provides family and individual counseling and referral services.

McDonald said that he encourages anyone who wants more information to call the 24-hour hotline at 725-8389.

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