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Pain pill, heroin abuse not unusual among teenagers

By JORDAN CRAVENS

staff writer

Heroin and pain pill abuse among northwestern Ohio high school students is not uncommon, according to Nancy Stephani, coordinator of emergency services at Century Health, a treatment center in Findlay.

"It's not every kid in every class, but they are using a lot," Stephani said of students in Hancock, Putnam, Wyandot, Hardin and Seneca counties.

She's seen opiate addicts as young as 15, and so far this month, she's already had two teenagers come in for addiction treatment. Two a month is about average, she said.

Pain pills are easily accessible, according to Findlay Police Sgt. Mike Martien, who works in the city schools as a crime prevention officer. Some students are getting into medicine cabinets and are using the drugs or selling them, he said.

Principals at Cory-Rawson, Carey and North Baltimore high schools said there haven't been any drug seizures during the past couple years during the school day, but students are abusing prescription drugs outside of school.

Shawn Carpenter, chief probation officer for Hancock County Juvenile Court, said young people are abusing Percocet, Vicodin, and Tylenol with codeine, among other drugs.

"Kids will buy them from other kids and have no idea what they are buying," he said.

Hancock County Sheriff's Deputy Mike McGuire, who is a school resource officer, said he has heard rumors about students using heroin outside of school. But, he said, no students have been found with the drug at school.

At Findlay High School, "the majority of what we are finding on our kids is marijuana," but prescription pills have also been confiscated from students, said Principal Victoria Swartz.

Nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol can be "gateway drugs" for opiate abuse, Stephani said.

Northwest Ohio schools use guidance counselors, substance abuse counselors, talks from

police, and curriculum to educate students about drug and alcohol use.

Bob Falkenstein, principal of the North Baltimore Main Building, said "5th Quarter" events like dodgeball tournaments or costume parties are planned after football and basketball games, "so that kids aren't leaving the game and going out and partying."

A main focus at Findlay High School has been to link families up with services to help treat drug addiction or other issues, Swartz said.

Police also educate teachers at Findlay High School about what drugs are out there, what they look like, and how to identify drug paraphernalia, Swartz said.

Students caught with drugs face punishment from their school and criminal prosecution, according to police and administrators.

Craig Steenblock, a prevention specialist for the Hancock County Family Resource Center, coordinates the Challenge Program, used by county schools and juvenile court for students who have consumed alcohol underage or abused drugs. It is an eight-hour class spread over four meeting times.

"I am seeing quite a few more pill-poppers," Steenblock said of youth in the program.

In addition, Pat Sudlow, a prevention educator at the Family Resource Center, also leads the Hancock County Addiction Prevention Program for Youth program.

Often referred to as "HAPPY," the program started in the mid-1980s, she said.

Prescription drug and heroin abuse are among the topics discussed in the program, which teaches students leadership skills and healthy alternatives to take back to their schools and share with classmates relating to the dangers of alcohol and drug use, Sudlow said.

Online:

www.centuryhealth.net

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