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Watch for signs of opiate addiction

By JORDAN CRAVENS

staff writer

Alcoholics can be a dead giveaway with the smell of booze on their breath. Heroin and painkiller abusers are harder to recognize.

But there are signs to indicate someone is hooked on highly addictive, and sometimes fatal, opiates.

"With opiate users, often the pupils get smaller, almost like a pinpoint," said Lynn Snyder, a substance abuse therapist at Century Health, a treatment center in Findlay.

Snyder said another red flag is if money and valuables turn up missing. Addicts will stop at nothing to get drugs, she said.

She once had a client who admitted to stealing medication from a family member who was in hospice care, and another who racked up a five-figure credit card bill purchasing merchandise she later pawned to get money for drugs.

"There is almost an unlimited number of ways you can pay for drugs," said Kendra Grant, who has been working in the addiction treatment field for more than a decade.

Drug dealers don't just accept money. They also take DVDs, electronics, diapers and formula, Grant said.

Also, be on the lookout for drug paraphernalia.

Finding cut-up straws where there are no cups, powder residue on hard surfaces, rolled-up dollar bills, or balled-up foil may indicate the person is snorting opiates.

Typically, "they would be using these things first before shooting it (with a syringe)," Grant said.

Drug tests can also be used as a tool determine if someone is using.

"If they deny it, then say, 'Prove it!'" Snyder said.

For children, knowing parents are drug testing can give them an out from peer pressure,

Grant said.

Behavioral changes, like withdrawing from family activities, are also associated with addiction, according to Angy Shaferly, a registered nurse at Anhedonia, an opiate addiction treatment center in Findlay.

Doctor and pharmacy shopping can also be a signal. If a person is continually changing doctors or pharmacies, they may be trying to get more opiates, Shaferly said.

Track marks on a person's arms are also a sign of abuse. But the professionals say by the time a person is shooting drugs through a syringe, the addiction has advanced.

And not everyone shoots up through their arms. Some shoot up between their toes, Snyder said.

But still, take note if someone is wearing long sleeves out of season, Shaferly said.

If a person admits to using, or you have identified them as an abuser of drugs, the worst thing to do is bail them out, Snyder said.

"The sooner they see their life is falling apart, the easier it is to get them clean," she said.

"The family members, especially with these younger people, have got to come down on them right away and not enable them," she said.

Treatment, medicated detoxification and offering to go to Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous with the user are recommended by the professionals.

Parents should talk to their children about drugs and their abuse, although it's admittedly a difficult task, Grant said.

"Most people would put more effort into buying a house rather than research prevention of drug abuse with their children," she said.

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