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ASAP board seeking to curb prescription abuse

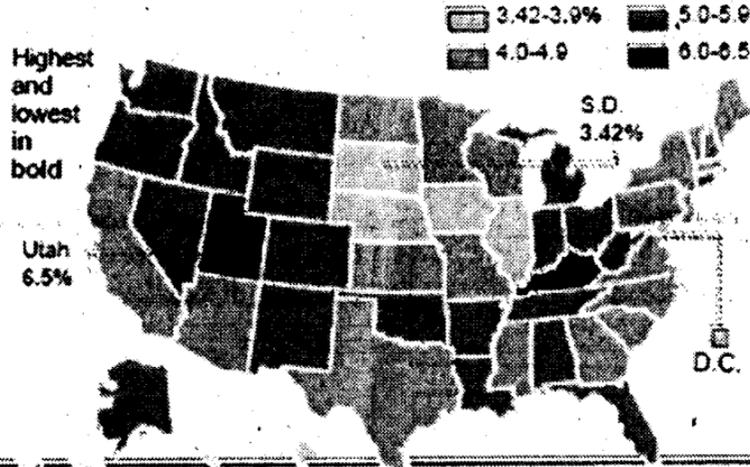
By JULIE GRIZZARD
The Mayfield Messenger

The Graves County Kentucky Agency for Substance Abuse Policy Board (ASAP) serves the entire county of Graves with the mission to help the community be free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by seeking to change the culture that approves of and supports alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. They hope to accomplish this by working with concerned community partners to educate, treat, and prevent the use of these substances.

ASAP board member and licensed and accredited Christian Counselor Joseph Williams of Mayfield says he and the other agency members are concerned about the growing prescription drug problem in Graves County. "We try to do what we can to

Use of pain-killing prescription drugs

Prescription drugs are the second most abused class of drugs after cannabis. Pain relieving drugs such as fentanyl, oxycodone and hydrocodone have led to a rising number of deaths.



SOURCE: Department of Health

better educate the community," says Williams, adding that there are many ways that prescription drugs can be obtained, but the easiest way

for most is by simply opening a medicine cabinet.

Williams stated, "I would compare keeping unused prescription drugs in a home with

children to having a loaded gun in the medicine cabinet with a child in the house. Most children are not afraid to pick up a pill bottle but are more apprehensive about picking up a loaded gun."

According to Williams, statistics show that the incidents of substance use for students in grades 7-12 at both Mayfield and Graves County schools rank the use of tobacco first with prescription drugs coming in second before alcohol and other illicit drugs. Usually, they get them from their own family's medicine cabinets.

Williams says the agency works to identify problems in the community, and then in cooperation with local law enforcement, work to find

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ASAP board

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solutions to educate the public on the dangers of misuse of prescribed and non-prescribed drugs. "The Graves County Sheriff's Department holds prescription drug drop offs," says Williams and urges everyone to take advantage. Drop offs allow people to empty drawers, cabinets and other storage stuffed with pills that may be expired or are otherwise useless. The old method of flushing the tablets down the toilet is no longer recommended. Stories of children stealing and abusing the prescription drugs are becoming more and more common.

"The use of a prescription medication may start legitimately," says Graves County Sheriff John Davis, but he says that the number of people who are abusing prescription drugs is alarming and has become a major problem. Davis says he hopes that more people become educated about the problem, and hopefully, lives will be saved. "Methamphetamine is a major problem in this area," stated Davis, "but prescription drug abuse is even more dangerous and prevalent than the use of meth in this county." Davis further explained how large numbers of people are becoming addicted to opiates and other prescription drugs.

"Somebody may go to the doctor for a legitimate injury, to the dentist for a tooth extraction, or maybe they are going through a hard time and need medication to help them with a grieving process,"

explained Davis, but added that within a couple of months of taking the prescription, people from all walks of life; rich and poor; educated and uneducated; religious and non-religious, become addicted to the very medication that was given to help them.

According to reports by the Narcotics Control Board, the number of Americans abusing prescription drugs nearly doubled from 7.8 million in to 15.1 million within ten years. Among the top abused prescription drugs were the painkillers oxycodone, or OxyContin, and hydrocodone, sold as Vicodin. These medications were reportedly being used by 7.4 percent of college students.

According to Williams, the state of Kentucky has the unfortunate distinction of leading the nation in prescription drug use for non-medical purposes. The number of people abusing prescription drugs is near the point of exceeding the use of illicit street narcotics, he said. The abuse of painkillers, stimulants, tranquilizers and other prescription medications has gone beyond practically all illicit drugs with the exception of cannabis, with increasing numbers of young users turning to the prescription medication first, and Williams says this is because of the accessibility of the medications, in addition to the commercialized sales of medications.

"With pharmaceutical commercials on television, it seems the use of prescription medications is becoming a norm. Misuse or abuse of pre-

scriptions are as dangerous as illegal and illicit drugs." Williams says that it seems that there is a pill for whatever may be wrong. "It is up to us (ASAP), as well as schools, law enforcement, and parents to educate ourselves and others so that another life is not lost due to the misuse or abuse of a prescription medication."

Lack of knowledge and training, limited availability of treatment and funding are the obstacles faced by the Graves County ASAP. The board of the ASAP strongly believes its long-term work in the community will bring about the cultural changes to reduce apathetic attitudes supporting alcohol, tobacco, and other

drug use and abuse.

For counseling or other assistance, contact any one of the following local resources:

- Joseph Williams, Christian Counseling 270-247-5667

- Four Rivers Behavioral Health 270-247-2588 or go to www.4rbh.org

- Merit Behavioral 270-251-3666

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are held at the First Presbyterian Church at 303 W. Broadway in Mayfield on Monday and Tuesday at 8 p.m.; Wednesday at 6:45 p.m. and on Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

For further information contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at 1-800-662-HELP.