

**Notes from MPHA Forum:
Teens and addictive behaviors: What are our teens getting into?
March 29, 2013**

Forum Panelists:

- Jessica Knutson, American Cancer Society
- Ken Winters, PhD, University of Minnesota Medical School, Professor in Dept. of Psychiatry
- Cray Thornton, student at P.E.A.S.E. Academy
- Emily Styba, student at P.E.A.S.E. Academy

Forum Moderator:

- Ellen Benavides, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Health

Opening Remarks:

Ellen Benavides, Moderator:

- Provides overview of current topics in teen addictions
 - 1 out of 4 high school students in the U.S. smoke cigarettes
 - Youth who start drinking alcohol in middle school are at a much greater risk for addiction later in life
 - Teens brains are not fully developed, which increases harm and risk for addictive behaviors

Ken Winters:

- Today, we know a lot more about addiction in general, and also how addiction relates to teens
 - If you have an addiction, chances are great that you started that behavior as a young person
 - Time it takes to become addicted is much shorter in youth than it is in adults
- A lot of international research has been conducted on the topics of adolescent brain development and risk taking behaviors
 - Drug use and sensation seeking can be more rewarding for teens due to their developmental stage
- All of this points to the importance of prevention and treatment for teenage substance use

Cray Thornton:

- For teens addicts, there is always a chance of recovery; I am proud to say I am an example of this
- I speak regularly at Fairview outpatient treatment, as well as schools about my recovery

Jessica Knutson:

- Will be primarily addressing tobacco and tanning
- Teens and tanning
 - Skin cancer is the only type of cancer that is on the rise
 - With indoor tanning, the damage to the skin is cumulative
 - 42% of 14-17 year olds use tanning beds
 - The message we are trying to convey: you wouldn't let your teen smoke, so why would you let them use tanning beds?
- Teens and tobacco
 - 50% of all smokers will die due to their tobacco use
 - Tobacco is still the leading cause of cancer death
 - Tobacco companies are spending considerable time and money marketing smokeless tobacco products (i.e. "orbs", "sticks", etc.)
 - These products are packaged to look like candy or breath strips
 - "Dual use" marketing: "When you can't smoke, use these."
 - American Cancer Society is working to raise the tobacco tax

Emily Styba:

- Wants to remind the audience that self-mutilation can be a serious addiction problem for youth; can be just as addicting as drugs or alcohol
 - Self-mutilation and suicide attempts are often overlooked in the context of addiction; this is hurtful since I have struggled with these forms of addiction myself

Question: Can you tell the audience, what is an "addictive behavior" or "addictive personality"?

Cray:

- When I was using, the only thing I could think about was how and when I could get the next drug; if I couldn't get the drug, I was miserable
- An addictive personality is being completely dependent

Emily:

- An addictive personality is not being able to take just one drink, one pill, etc.
- Also, addictive personalities need increased doses of their drug; one more drink, one more pill, etc. to reach the high they are looking for

Cray:

- Addicts don't know what moderation is

Question: What are some skills teens need to cope today?

Cray:

- For me, talking to another alcoholic or addict is really helpful; to know that other people are struggling with the same things is really helpful
- Tobacco is also a coping strategy for me

Emily:

- Being at a recovery school and talking to other addicts is so helpful
- My horse is also extremely important
- Also, nicotine helps me cope

Ken Winters:

- We need to help teach kids how to sort through options, which can lead to better decision making

Jessica Knutson:

- “Just Say No” Campaign didn’t work well
- Tobacco industry is so good at knowing what works
- Tobacco users have an immediate social group with other users
 - Notes that 40% of LGBT population uses tobacco products; highlights importance of being accepted into a social circle of tobacco users

Question from audience: For college-bound youth in recovery, would specific housing for those in recovery make a difference?

Cray and Emily:

- YES

Question from audience: What are early signs of adolescent substance abuse?

Jessica Knutson:

- New tobacco products are very easy to go unnoticed due to their clever packaging (i.e. resemble tic tacs, breath strips); we really need to make parents aware of what these products are

Emily:

- Teens who are using often stop caring a lot

Question from audience: How does P.E.A.S.E. Academy incorporate recovery into their school?

Cray:

- P.E.A.S.E. stands for “Peers Enjoying a Sober Education”

- We have peer support therapy, sober support groups, and recovery topics with our teachers

Question from audience: Does delayed gratification enter the coping discussion?

Ken Winters:

- Depending on where you are on the vulnerability spectrum, you could be more prone to addiction

Question from audience: Why do recovery programs promote tobacco as an acceptable addiction?

Cray:

- There is no really good reason

Emily:

- The thought is, "At least they're not doing X drug"
- It's also part of the addiction personality; you are really good at justifying whatever you're doing

Jessica Knutson:

- Tobacco is legal
- Also, kids have the tendency to think they are invincible, and they don't necessarily see tobacco as harmful to them

Question from audience: How do we support addicts to quit or reduce their tobacco use?

Emily:

- I haven't smoked in six months; Cessation aids have been very helpful, I use an electronic cigarette

Jessica Knutson:

- At the American Cancer Society, we only recommend FDA approved cessation therapy (gum, patch, etc.)

Emily:

- I didn't start smoking until I was in recovery

Question from audience: How much of an addictive personality is genetic vs. environmental?

Ken Winters:

- There is some hereditary component but addiction is also largely environmental

- Environmental factors such as where you live, who you marry, etc. can be important factors in addiction

Cray:

- Whenever I tried harder drugs, it was always environmental (other people were using these drugs at the time)
- Also, addiction does run in my family

Jessica Knutson:

- The number one predictor of whether kids will smoke is if their parents smoke

Question from audience: How do we change a culture that promotes tanning as “good”?

Jessica Knutson:

- Want to see indoor tanning restricted to those under the age of 18
 - Currently, teens in Minnesota can tan if they have a parent signature on file

Questions from audience: How can we support teens as a society to have a more positive role to contribute?

Ken Winters:

- We need to start at home by supporting our kids

Audience member:

- Teens need to have more of a voice in organizations, boards, etc.

Question from audience: What can help reduce the stigma of teen addiction?

Emily:

- I wouldn't change anything about what I've been through; it's changed me and for the better

Ken Winters:

- We know so much more about emotional and behavioral disorders, but we are not getting the information out there

Jessica Knutson:

- We have to be careful not to vilify the addict
 - At the American Cancer Society, we are careful to make sure smokers don't feel attacked

Cray:

- Addiction can happen to anyone; we need to address this in high schools

Closing Remarks by Ellen Benavides, Moderator and Dave Golden, MPHA President

Please save the date for the next Forum: **Friday May 17th, 2013 -- Teens and Sports Participation: Are the risks and benefits in balance?**

Time: 7:30-9:00am. Location: Concordia University-St. Paul: Buenger Education Center (BEC), 200 Syndicate St. N., St. Paul

The last forum will explore the role that sports participation plays among our teens. Panelists will focus on the role of intramural and recreational sports activities in healthy development, healthy versus harmful sports participation, the social pressure to become sports heroes, and the rise in sports injuries.