

NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

Prescription Drug Abuse: The Dangers and Consequences of Usage and Implications for Camps



Gwenn Kudler Gelfand
LCSW
gkudler-gelfand@sobelins.com

Drug Abuse is not new to our society and as Camp Directors it is not a new issue to be dealt with. Marijuana, cocaine and heroine are among the drugs that continue to be experimented with by our teens. What is significantly more recent and concerning is the increase in prescription drug abuse in recent years.

As a society, more children and teens are being prescribed medication for disorders like Attention Deficit Disorder, with or without hyperactivity. Drugs like Ritalin, Concerta, Vyvanse and Adderall are widely prescribed and frequently used. With academic pressures increasing for our youth it has become widespread for teens to attempt to seek out these drugs to help increase their ability to focus and concentrate. It is now commonplace for many students to take these drugs before standardized tests for college admission, although often unprescribed. In addition, a common side effect of these drugs is weight loss and consequently many teens are seeking to secure these drugs and utilize them for this purpose as well. They are being sold in schools and on the street by people who are prescribed them and even some physicians are writing prescriptions illegally for this purpose. Drug sharing has become a thing of the times. In my own psychotherapy practice I see dozens of teens who are taking these drugs without a prescription authorizing their use. It is not hard to get them, but the risks of usage are extremely high since these drugs are not being monitored.

A drug that has gained increasing recognition is Oxycontin, also known as poor man's heroine. This is a prescribed medication that is used for chronic pain associated with injuries, back pain, arthritis and terminal cancer. It is a time released form of a narcotic called oxycodone hydrochloride . It has effects similar to pain killers like codeine, methadone and morphine. It can also be abused to gain a euphoric high. It is prescribed in tablet form but when abused it can be taken in a number of ways including chewing, snorting, crushing and dissolving and injecting the contents. These methods bypass the released aspect which speeds up the medication into the system. This increases the risk of an overdose which can slow down or stop breathing leading to death. Other toxic side effects include dizziness, weakness, seizures, loss of consciousness and are even more dangerous when used in conjunction with alcohol. Teens are using this drug more and more and it has become easier and easier to obtain.

With this in mind, lets talk about the implications for camp and for possible usage of these drugs by our campers. An increasing number of our youth come to camp with prescribed medication for concentrating and focusing. Some are prescribed antidepressants as well. Although camp forms require parents to indicate if their child is taking medication, many parents, especially of older teens, do not. Therefore campers often bring their own medication to camp and it remains in the bunk, rather than in the infirmary. Medication in the bunk poses a threat of potential danger. Campers can overmedicate themselves,

MARCH

SOBELUTIONS

2011

NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!

they can dispense it to others and it can be taken by other campers without one's knowledge. Counselors should never be permitted to dispense medication. Once again, although camp directors make every effort to keep their camp alcohol free, alcohol in camps exists and drug usage is even more dangerous when combined with alcohol.

Campers and counselors need to be educated regarding the risks and consequences of using medication for unintended purposes or by giving or seeking medication to or from others. This should be done at orientation meetings and clear guidelines should be administered. Although drugs differ in their effects, counselors should be advised to alert group leaders and directors if they suspect usage. Change in appetite, change in mood, change in physical state whether being full of excessive energy or sluggish and tired, changes in speech and red, dilated eyes are commonly observed side effects. There should be a no tolerance policy for any drug usage or illegal dispensing of medication to others. The seriousness of these acts needs to be conveyed to parents and campers prior to camp as well as to counselors in orientation meetings, and campers in division meetings once camp begins. Education is the key to prevention.

SOBEL AFFILIATES – The SOLUTION for your Camp Insurance needs!



595 Stewart Avenue, Garden City, NY 11350-4735 P 516.745.1111 F 516.745.5733 www.sobelins.com