



Drug Trends

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This presentation focused on drug trends in West Michigan, including the realities of the opioid epidemic. Presenters discussed the increasing popularity of marijuana extracts, both edible and Butane Hash Oil (BHO), the dangers of common chemical BHO extraction techniques, cited both statistics and trends relating to the use of prescription opiates and heroin, and provided information on the relatively new and highly unregulated use of “vape” devices that adolescents use for both nicotine and cannabis intake. The informative and powerful Federal Bureau of Investigation-produced film, “Chasing the Dragon,” was shown and discussed.

The realities of the opioid epidemic includes the fact that more than one million people in the U.S. abused for the first time in 2014, according to statistics, and the problem has increased significantly since 2014. Also in 2014—and it is thought that this number has increased since then—44 people per day died in the U.S. One in five high school seniors admitted to abusing narcotics at least once. The drug of choice is prescription narcotics, however when those are unavailable or become too expensive, addicts often begin using narcotics purchased on the streets, heroin in particular. Use of heroin is usually concurrent with abuse of other drugs including illegally produced fentanyl and an array of synthetic substances, in addition to prescription drugs if they can be obtained. Nor is the use of opiates, including heroin, just a “big city” problem. Both urban and rural areas are plagued by the problem.

A common method for abusers to obtain narcotics is get them, or steal them, from family members. As people become more aware of this they are beginning to secure narcotic medications, or dispose of them; Michigan State Police posts accept drop offs of prescription drugs that are then safely destroyed. The multi-faceted approach that police are taking to fight the opioid epidemic include, but is not limited to, public education on securing medications and/or destroying unneeded medications and shutting down doctors that intentionally over-prescribe narcotics. Traditional policing methods also result in arrests and convictions of users and dealers. Additionally, the state has enacted rules that limit the amount and frequency that doctors can prescribe narcotics.

The presentation also explored developing issues with “vapes,” the rapidly expanding and highly unregulated devices for delivery of nicotine, or drugs such as marijuana, and e-cigarettes. Vapes and e-cigarettes have become a multi-billion dollar industry. Despite known and suspected health issues, examination of packaging of vape devices indicate that the products are marketed for teens. A related topic discussed was “dabbing”, the recently-developed method of extracting THC, the chemical in marijuana that creates the high experienced by users. Today’s marijuana is much more potent than in past decades. Dabbing allows producers to create a nearly pure hashish-type substance, with a THC level of 60-80%, Butane Honey Oil (BHO), from stems and other parts of the cannabis plant that used to be considered waste.

The drug can be inhaled using vape-type devices, or smoked, and is often ingested. Street names for the drug include “wax” and “crumble.” Because the substance is manufactured in street labs,



potency and dosages are inconsistent. The manufacture of the substance, which as its name implies uses butane gas in a part of the process, is also dangerous and has been the cause of numerous fires and explosions.

The presentation featured viewing of the FBI/DEA production “Chasing the Dragon,” a film that depicts the hopelessness and powerlessness of persons, regardless of age, gender, or race. Addicts repeat the cycles of getting and using substances, and if driven by desperation, will do almost anything to get high, returning over and over to the people, places, and things and enable their continued use. As one narrator put it, “You are who you hang out with, and you can’t maintain an opiate addiction and a ‘normal’ lifestyle for very long.”