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USN Students Work to Reduce Teen Drug Abuse

Newly formed Drug Abuse Awareness Team aims to teach Clark County youth about dangers of drug abuse

Prescription drug abuse has become a growing problem among America's youth. According to the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NS-DUH), more than 2.1 million teens ages 12 to 17 reported abusing prescription drugs in 2006 and among 12- and 13-year-olds, prescription drugs are their drug of choice.

This information isn't anything new to a group of pharmacy students attending the University of Southern Nevada (USN). Last year, they united to tackle this growing problem of drug abuse and addiction, forming the Drug Abuse Awareness Team (DAAT). The group, now 67 members strong, is dedicated to educating the youth of the Clark County School District (CCSD) about the abuse of prescription and nonprescription drugs as well as the dangers of addiction.

Armed with a comprehensive and interactive program, members of DAAT completed five presentations in recent months, attended by more than 1,000 students at six at-risk middle schools identified by the school district.

"The team's goal is to dispel the myth that prescription drug use is safer and less addicting and to make a positive impact in the lives of area youth," said Dr. Paul Oesterman, assistant professor of pharmacy practice and DAAT faculty co-adviser.

"The responses from students and teachers that have experienced the program have been extremely positive and we're looking forward to many more presentations already scheduled for the coming months."

The group is the brainchild of USN pharmacy student Erica Zelickowski, who got the idea while listening to a local radio program discussing the prevalence of prescription drug misuse in local high schools compared to illicit drug abuse.

"The program discussed how easy it is for students to access these drugs," said Zelickowski. "A key to preventing this growing trend is spreading the message out about the danger of drug addiction to America's youth. As a student pursuing a career as a pharmacist, I felt it was part of my duty to help educate these people about the dangers of prescription drugs and hopefully make an impact in their lives."

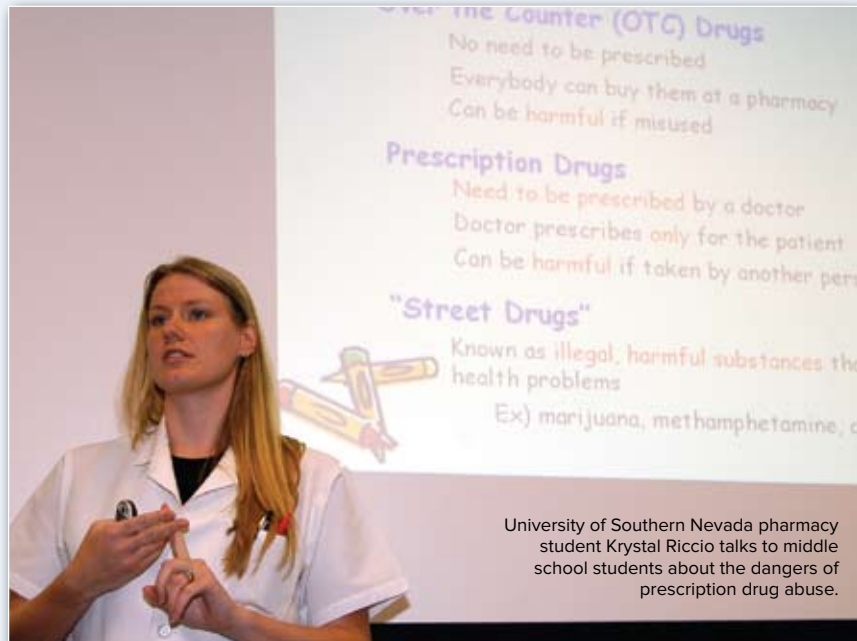
Zelickowski brought her idea to start an educational outreach group to Dr. Allison Welder, professor of pharmaceutical sciences and faculty co-adviser, who en-

couraged her to present her ideas to her class.

According to Zelickowski, the response regarding participation was immediate. "I didn't expect such a response from so many people," she said. "By the end of the week we had created a mission statement and objectives for DAAT."

"It is our hope that we can influence and educate as many children as possible about drug misuse so they can be armed with the knowledge about the possibilities and consequences of these destructive behaviors," said DAAT member Susan Armino.

As a result of their work, the United States Public Health Services recently awarded the University of Southern Nevada's DAAT a Public Health Practice Pharmacy Award.



University of Southern Nevada pharmacy student Krystal Riccio talks to middle school students about the dangers of prescription drug abuse.