

## Presentation focuses on preventing prescription drug abuse

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Sheets riddled with code phrases such as "%/" and "#-)" born from the texting age were handed out to begin a prescription drug abuse presentation Thursday evening at the Kodiak High School commons.

The presentation was put on by the Native Village of Afognak.

"Your kids can figure out the blanks. Can you?" Emily Arnick, from Native Village of Afognak, asked the audience.

Many of the young to older adult audience could not.

The test showed what to be aware of when trying to prevent prescription drug abuse from the group most likely to do it — teenagers.

Children aged 12 to 17 and young adults are most likely to abuse prescription drugs such as Oxycontin or Vicadin this year.

Drug abuse is using drugs in a way that harms one's health or harms relationships with family and friends.

Alaska state trooper Jeremy Stone said educating children is of the utmost importance.

"Really we need to get this message out to them," Stone said. "Young people are using these medications in a much more frequent manner and becoming addicted every year."

Almost 1 million teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 are using prescription drugs, and they're coming from users' and friends' medicine cabinets — not from drug dealers.

In Kodiak complaints of prescription abuse arrived in 1992.

From 2002 to 2005 reports ranged from one to three abusers. In 2006 it jumped to nine, then 15 the following year, before dropping to six in 2008 and increasing to 14 last year.

"So far this year, we've had 13 reports," Detective Sgt. Milton Bohac of the Kodiak Police Department said.

He said compared to methamphetamine and other drugs in Kodiak, prescription drug abuse pales in comparison.

"The numbers are increasing, but if you average it out we still are only getting about one report a month," Bohac said.

Although presenters spoke to the harmful effects of prescription drugs, they didn't want to label all of them the same way.

"People may come to believe all prescription drugs are bad — they aren't," said Viki Wells of the Alaska Division of Behavioral Health.

With national prescription drug abuse on the rise because of availability and social acceptance of the drugs, the panelists brought forth what the community can do.

People addicted to prescription drugs should seek out health professionals and work with them to start a treatment program.

For those who could become another user statistic, prevention lies in education of children and better care of the prescription drugs.

The presenters said you should dispose of what you don't use anymore in a way that it can't be dug out of the garbage, and to be aware of products that can be used in a harmful way like opioids, drugs used to manage pain.

Kodiak Community Health Center clinic director Dr. William Arnold said that Kodiak can not only combat the problem, but also set an example.

"We're pretty fortunate to have a small, close-knit community," he said. "We're fortunate in a lot of ways to combat this, but perhaps this community ... with everybody, can create a model for this to see how things can work."

What that could be isn't entirely clear, but presenters and audience members — some of them recovering abusers — know there is a problem that must be met head-on.

"What we have is certainly a problem in the community," said Brian Narog, chief pharmacist for the Kodiak Area Native Association.

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