

KIDS ARE BACK IN SCHOOL. UNFORTUNATELY, SO ARE ILLICIT DRUGS.

High Watch Recovery Center sees larger numbers of young adults using a wider variety of substances and entering treatment at an earlier age than ever before.

High Watch Recovery Center in Kent, CT, one of the country's leading residential substance abuse treatment facilities for over 70 years, is seeing a dramatic change in the age and condition of patients who come through their doors. Those entering treatment today are younger and sicker than a generation ago. In what has become an alarming development in the American way of life, the changing face of addiction is cause for concern for all Americans.

“The increasing numbers of 18 – 25 year olds coming through the High Watch doors have been exposed to drugs at a much earlier phase in their lives, many in high school or before. They are suffering mixed addictions from using a wide variety of substances as a familiar and common coping strategy to deal with their routine stresses. Therefore, at our treatment center, we are seeing the damaging effects of addiction to health and lifestyle emerging at a much earlier age,” says Dr. Oreste Arcuni, the Director of Addiction Medicine at High Watch Recovery Center.

“We live in a culture where children are exposed to drugs at an earlier age than a generation ago. Medication for pain management is being prescribed to adults at an alarming rate. Children are obtaining this pain medication from their parent's cabinets. The youth enjoy the high and begin seeking these medications from their peers. It begins to get expensive so they revert to a less expensive high and begin using heroin. This is their drug of choice when they walk through our doors.” according to Janina J. Kean, President and CEO of High Watch Recovery Center.

An Alarming Trend - Substance Abuse/Addiction Among Young Is On The Rise

In the culture of substance use by younger users it is no longer a question of using or not using. It is a question of what drug, how much and how long. Given a wide variety of choices, teens are “normalizing” the use of drugs in the youth culture. According to NIDA's latest study of 8th through 12th graders, “many beliefs/attitudes about drugs by young people are drug specific...youth do not generalize the adverse consequences of one drug's use to others.”

Unfortunately, word of powerful effects or alleged benefits about using a specific drug usually spreads among teens much faster than information about the consequences. Especially with social media, the “positive spin” on a drug becomes “normalized” among peers. “This is a highly dangerous trend,” says Dr. Arcuni, “as the young user can be addicted in as short a period as one week. With many drugs now there is no longer an extended period of abuse (like heavy drinking) before someone crosses over into

addiction. Also, our youth are being exposed to these drugs during a time, before their early 20's, when their brain impulse control centers are not fully developed and damage can be permanent.”

Youth in Treatment

According to Ms. Kean, “Our youth are entering treatment usually through a family relative. Most often the referral is made by a significantly older relative who has been in recovery themselves. Even though the drugs most likely were different, it’s powerful force to bring them to treatment.”

For those who seek treatment, something has happened to jolt them into the recognition that their life is in trouble. An arrest, an accident, an intervention, being treated by their own peers as losers, or their social circles became broken and they lose friends. Drug use has altered their moods or they have built a tolerance to it. Emotionally and cognitively they’re not doing well.

“We’re seeing many younger people who enter treatment at High Watch Recovery Center with ambivalence and confusion about the illness itself. They start with awareness that their life has been altered, but even those who have lost peers/friends to drug usage do not really have a concept of their own life and death struggle. High Watch personnel are experts at resolving the ambivalence and the confusion about addiction and the usage of drugs with the younger population. They are especially skillful at this. We also have key personnel here in solid recovery, who are young people themselves. This helps to support the message of 12 step recovery, the illness of addiction, and its biologic treatments to our younger patients,” added Dr. Arcuni.

High Watch Recovery Center experts are available for interviews about “The Changing Face of Addiction”.

Janina J. Kean, APRN, is President & CEO of High Watch Recovery Center. She is a nationally recognized expert and spokesperson in the field of substance abuse.

Dr. Oreste J. Arucuni, MD is Director of Addiction Medicine at High Watch. He is Board Certified by the American Board of Addiction Medicine. He is also Board certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology in Psychiatry and Geriatric Psychiatry.

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RESEARCH FACTS from NIDA (National Institute of Drug Abuse)

NIDA's 2010 monitoring study of high school and youth trends – overview of trends in drug use among teenagers in grades 8 – 12 – raises concerns about increases in drug use among teens, particularly the youngest.

- General declines in drug use since mid-1990s have stopped.
- “Generational forgetting” increases abuse among young people as they rediscover drugs they know nothing about. Heroin, crack, PCP and cocaine have followed that pattern ---currently LSD, inhalants and ecstasy use are increasing as perceived risk for these drugs is low among young people who are unfamiliar with their consequences.
- Many beliefs/attitudes about drugs by young people are drug specific...youth do not generalize the adverse consequences of one drug's use to other drugs.
- Unfortunately, word about using a new drug usually spreads much faster than information about consequences. Especially with social media, etc.
- Abuse of Rx drugs continue to increase, even as use of some illegal drugs leveled or decline since mid-1990s.
- Use of Ecstasy had been declining overall but 2010 saw increases in use of ecstasy among 8th and 10th graders.
- Daily marijuana use increased among 8, 10, 12 graders from 2009 to 2010.
- Marijuana daily use is the highest point since the early 1980s among high school seniors at 6.1%.
- Marijuana use is now ahead of cigarette smoking in many cases. For example, in 2010, 21.4 percent of 12th graders used marijuana in the past 30 days vs. 19.2 percent who smoked cigarettes.
- After marijuana, prescription and over-the-counter medicines account for most of the top drugs abused. For example, Oxycontin use has increased among 10th graders for 5 years in a row.
- Alcohol use among youth tends to parallel trends in illicit drug use. While data on “binge drinking” show levels below the peaks of the 1980s and 1990s, alcohol use remains extremely widespread among today's teens with 71% having consumed alcohol by end of high school and 36% by the 8th grade.