

Former addict warns of abuse

Prescription drugs are largely found at home

BY LYNN MELLIS WORTHINGTON REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

KENT — Prescription drug abuse is reaching epidemic proportions, said Lou Sarandrea, who knows firsthand the drastic consequences of such a habit.

Sarandrea, originally from Waterbury, is now the after care coordinator at High Watch Recovery Center, but when he first came to the facility in 2004 it was as a patient.

His downward spiral began in high school with the use of prescription drugs and progressed to heroin.

His story is not uncommon, as he described his addiction, which caused a suicide attempt and a serious battle with hepatitis C.

"Prescription drugs can be as dangerous as illicit ones," said High Watch Director Nick Pohl. "I think people can be quick to think that they're safer because they are prescribed by a doctor."

Recent news out of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that for the first time deaths associated with prescription drugs exceed deaths from motor vehicle accidents, killing more than 37,000 people nationwide, he said.

"Research has taught us that most abused prescription drugs are taken from family or friends," said Donna Saliter of the prevention network. "This initiative helps remove from the home unused drugs that could otherwise be a temptation."

Sarandrea talked about pill, or bowling parties, in which adolescents raid their parents' medicine cabinets and pour huge amounts of different drugs into a bowl. The teens then grab handfuls and swallow them.

Dr. Oreste Arcuni, director of addiction medicine at High Watch, said, "The big problem now is that these drugs are finding their way to youths who are younger and younger." Kean added, "We see it in 9- and 10-year olds." Adults who are hooked on opiates may have children who mirror their behavior.

Cost can be a factor in the rise in popularity of opiates. Some can go for \$5 a pill on the street and upward. But they're also seeing that as the price of opiates rises, many are turning to heroin which can be cheaper.

Arcuni talked about the emotional and physical aspects of addiction to opiates. He said once a person gets hooked they need more and more of them to get pleasure and relief. "The pleasure center inside the brain is demanding to be fed to fill the need for pleasure, while at the same time, the part of the brain dealing with willpower is weakened."

"I can attest to that," Sarandrea said.