

# Care, Comfort and Hope

## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

### Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse and Addiction

Alcohol and substance abuse can have a devastating effect on individuals, families and society. Armed with expertise and determination, Wisconsin hospitals are fighting the war on drugs and alcohol in their communities with counseling and services aimed at prevention and treatment.

#### **Many agencies unite to protect children endangered by drugs**

A drug arrest of a parent is a scary, confusing time for children. But, sadly, it's likely not the children's first experience with chaos and fear. A two-county collaboration of law enforcement, health, child protection and other professionals have composed a protocol to give the long-term safety of these children the highest priority.

Pete Van Dusartz, manager of Hudson Hospital & Clinics' Programs for Change, said the 27 agencies involved have always worked closely. But through this initiative, called Drug Endangered Children (DEC), professionals from Pierce and St. Croix Counties have established a Memorandum of Understanding to "shift eyes off the person being arrested and onto the children affected," he said.

"It's really nice to have everyone in the same room and talk about the issue at the same time and focus on the health of the child," said Van Dusartz.

Efforts to better understand the impact of local drug use and its effect on children began in 2004 under the leadership of the hospital's Programs for Change in support of the Wisconsin Alliance for Drug Endangered Children. This local initiative has continued to evolve since then and was recognized at the 2008 statewide

conference for efforts in organizing and developing a community-wide program. The completion of the Memorandum of Understanding marks the end of the protocol development and the beginning of its implementation.

Van Dusart said the focus of the group was originally around meth use and labs. But that has expanded.

"There are fewer cases of breaking up meth labs, but not necessarily fewer cases of using meth in houses or around children. The children are not just exposed to drugs, but chaos and misdirected priorities," he said. "Even though some of the urgency that initiated this was in response to meth, we are addressing any form of drug abuse, sale and production where children are present."

Along with Van Dusart, hospital employees who serve on the DEC core committee are: Sara Rose, RN, manager, Emergency Care; and Karen Hansen, manager, Marketing & Community Relations.

**Hudson Hospital & Clinics, Hudson**



*DEC state recognition ceremony*

#### **Program on addiction offers family information and hope**

Addiction is often referred to as "the family disease" because it affects everyone. That's why Gundersen Lutheran Behavioral Health delivered a free four-week program geared to families of those who drink in excess or abuse drugs.

Participants learned about:

- Addiction as a disease
- The biological and psychological impact of addiction
- How living with a person who is addicted can make your behavior feel crazy or out of control too

The four classes—Alcohol/Addiction 101, Family Roles/Rules, Communication, and Resources and Support—were repeated every four weeks throughout the year to offer easy access to as many people in the community as possible.

**Gundersen Lutheran Health System, La Crosse**

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## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

### ***Preventing prescription drug abuse***

Prescription drug abuse is increasing at an alarming rate, and the abuse of prescription drugs is just as illegal as taking street drugs.

Last year, Merrill had one of the highest expulsion rates in the state for students who were caught with prescription drugs. Good Samaritan Health Center was not about to let the problem go unchallenged.

Recognizing the dangerous and growing trend, a community focus group of Merrill businesses and community servants, including representatives from Good Samaritan Health Center, Merrill Area Public Schools, the Merrill police department, and other health care organizations, began meeting to determine how to stop or slow down the problem.

“Simple steps can be taken to limit access to these drugs to keep your family and friends safe,” said Mike Hammer, president of Good Samaritan Health Center. “This truly was a community collaborative effort to address a significant problem.”

The community focus group decided to create a community education brochure to create awareness of the prescription drug abuse problem. It was distributed to all pharmacies in the city of Merrill, and even attached to each prescription sold, for a period of time.

Prescription drug abuse is a pervasive problem:

- More teens abuse prescription drugs than any other street drug.
- In some cases, it's easier to access prescription drugs than street drugs.
- Most who abuse prescription drugs do not see any risk involved by using them occasionally or mixing them with other medications for non-medical reasons.
- Many believe it's safe to abuse prescription drugs and don't see any risk involved in using them occasionally for recreational reasons.
- Abuse of prescription drugs can be dangerous and have unpredictable effects, including death.

The education brochure included information like the importance to note how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet, and keep track of refills. Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medications, and if you find that you have to refill medications more often than expected, it could be a sign that someone is taking your medication without your knowledge.

**Ministry Health Care - Good Samaritan Health Center, Merrill**

***Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org).***

