



Local coalition working to prevent substance abuse

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LAWTON, Okla—Oklahoma is losing ground against prescription drug abuse. In fact, prescription drug overdoses now kill more Oklahomans, an average of two per day, than car wrecks. Tuesday, the Lawton-Fort Sill Community Coalition shared some of the ways they're trying to curb that problem such as making it harder for abusers to get their hands on drugs and alcohol.

When it comes to prescription drugs, the coalition said people often just throw them in the trash and abusers will dig through trash cans and dumpsters to find them. The coalition also found that minors in Comanche County get the majority of their alcohol at special events. So, they decided to go to those events, to come up with ways to make it harder for minors to get alcohol there.

Events like Arts for All are fun for everyone, there's music, food and for the adults, alcohol. But the Wichita Mountains Prevention Network's Jennifer Ward said some minors are getting it, too.

"We're trying to combat that availability by giving event planners some feedback."

So they started sending their members undercover at these events to find ways to prevent underage drinking. The network's Taressa Macias said another challenge is changing the public's attitude toward prescription drug use and abuse.

"People think its okay to share their meds. It's not and it's illegal."

Lawton-Fort Sill Community Coalition Chair Dr. Tony Wohlers said prescription drug abuse in Comanche County is widespread.

"There's research out there that shows veterans are more and more confronted by this. Also, certain age groups are engaged in these activities. The key is it affects all age groups."

That's why he and the other coalition members said it's important to go straight to the source of these problems to find an avenue for change.

"Like doctors, like pharmacists and so forth. Make them aware of the problem and provide specific guidelines of what they can do to minimize the problem."

Macias said the coalition is hoping to start implementing a "social norm" strategy next month. She said its part of a push to change the community's attitude toward drug and alcohol abuse through the media and community events.

The coalition will meet again in October. The group includes members from higher education, the medical and education fields but they said the public is always welcome to join them in their fight against drug and alcohol abuse.