

McCurtain Memorial Hospital Lecture Series ‘Drug Abuse in McCurtain County’

Drug Abuse in McCurtain County was the August topic of The McCurtain Memorial Hospital Lecture Series with Steven Buck, Deputy Commissioner for Communication and Prevention with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) as the guest speaker. Mr. Buck reported that McCurtain County is ranked the highest in the state for methamphetamine (meth) use based on the number of residents entering drug treatment programs. In 2008, McCurtain County had 76 meth users per 10,000 population enrolled in treatment programs compared to the state average of 17.2 per 10,000 population. This data does not include individuals who may be enrolled in private treatment programs or individuals who use meth and have not entered any treatment program. Mr. Buck stated, “The good news about this is that it shows that treatment is available in McCurtain County, and that people do take advantage of it.”

In McCurtain County, alcohol is the second most common drug of choice and the third is marijuana. Mr. Buck explained that the drug of choice for an area is partly related to its geographic location. Rural areas are more prone to meth use because of the ability to “cook” the product in remote locations. Meth is easy and cheap to produce even with laws passed by the legislature to restrict the sale of substances used in the production of meth such as pseudoephedrine. Additionally, new methods of producing the drug such as the “shake and bake” method allow drug users to make the drug in smaller batches without setting up full-scale labs.

A positive statistic pointed out by Mr. Buck is that the percentage of students in McCurtain County who reported any use of meth in their lifetime was 1.4 percent compared to 2.0 percent statewide. But, when asked how easy it would be to get meth, nearly 20 percent of McCurtain County students said that it would be easy, compared to 16.8 percent statewide. These statistics indicate that factors leading to drug abuse in McCurtain County are more prevalent in the adult population.

Mr. Buck presented other aspects to drug use including socioeconomic facts that can lead to higher rates of drug use. Statistics show that areas of high unemployment, lower incomes, and other negative economic variables tend to experience more problems with

drug abuse. Improving economic conditions may lead to less use of narcotics, but education and prevention are certainly key measures to stopping the cycle of substance abuse.

McCurtain County benefits from many substance prevention efforts through the Southeastern Oklahoma Interlocal Cooperative (SOIC) Area Prevention Resource Center, one of 17 APRC’s funded by ODMHSAS. SOIC’s goal is to change social norms to reduce youth substance abuse and violence in McCurtain, Choctaw, Pushmataha, and LeFlore counties. Also, The McCurtain County Coalition for Change was recently awarded the Communities of Excellence Award and recognized by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) for its ‘Too Good for Drugs’ curriculum presented in many schools throughout the county. Mr. Buck also reported on the Coalition’s participation in the statewide “Fight Meth” campaign. ‘The Crystal Darkness,’ which presented a 30-minute statewide broadcast of the dangers and consequences of meth addiction to homes and viewing locations throughout the state. The Crystal Darkness events held in McCurtain County were among the highest attended in the state.

Mr. Buck completed his presentation with reference to up-and coming approaches to prevention and early intervention some of which may involve community doctors and hospitals conducting initial screening and referrals as well as the simple concept of extending our ideas of first aid to include “first aid of the mind.” As stated by Mr. Buck, “Every person can make a difference. With your help, we can effect change in Oklahoma and ensure that future generations can live happy, healthy and productive lives.”