



Reducing Substance Abuse

The Falmouth Prevention Partnership, a coalition of health care specialists, educators, police and business people, has been working for the past four years to reduce substance abuse among young people in town. It is a slow process, requiring multiple approaches to gradually change public perceptions and attitudes toward alcohol and drugs.

In short, the coalition is working to change the social environment in Falmouth.

Four years is not a long time considering the goal is to bring about long-term sustainable change. Some communities have been at it three and four times as long. Yet, there are indications that the coalition's efforts in Falmouth are working; a survey conducted this past spring showed that the use of alcohol among young people decreased over two years. Alcohol abuse has been the coalition's focus in that time.

It was with the partnership's work in mind that we read with amazement of the past year's development in Florida, where legislators and law enforcement officials finally took on the brisk trade in illegal prescription drugs.

New laws were passed last year to ban the sale of narcotics, such as oxycodone, in clinics and doctors' offices with dramatic effect. According to a report in The New York Times, purchases of oxycodone by Florida doctors were reduced by 97 percent in the first six months of this year from a peak level of 32.2 million doses in the first six months of 2010. About 400 clinics were shut down or closed their doors. Licenses were suspended for some 80 doctors, who prescribed large quantities of pills without clear medical need.

Not surprisingly, the price of illegal prescription medications doubled, and the number of addicts seeking help increased because they could no longer afford their habit.

If only reducing the use of illegal prescription drugs was that easy in Falmouth. It would be nice, in a way, for the prevention partnership to be able to chalk up a big success by picking such low-hanging fruit.

But we are actually very fortunate that Massachusetts has not been easy on doctors and clinics the way Florida was, which earned it the nickname "Oxy Express."

In Falmouth the low-hanging fruit are the unused medications that tend to collect in the homes of residents who receive a prescription but do not use all the pills. In the past year the police have held very successful drug take-back programs to gather these unused medications.

Meanwhile the prevention partnership's hard work of reducing alcohol and drug abuse in town continues. For more information, go to www.falmouthprevention.org.

