Outreach program designed to educate youth, parents on prescription drug abuse

By Jo Kiester

Prescription drug abuse among teenagers and young adults is on the rise in Idaho, ranking third behind methamphetamine and cocaine abuse, according to the Idaho Office of Drug Policy. Educating parents about the dangers facing their children every time they open their own medicine cabinet is one goal of a new outreach program organized by students attending the ISU College of Pharmacy.

Combat Prescription Drug Abuse is designed to also educate youth about the dangers of this sometimes-fatal practice. Through the support of a grant from the Idaho Society of Health-System Pharmacists, pharmacy students at ISU have begun educating Idaho’s youth, and others, about the risks associated with this growing problem.

Prescription drug abuse, in this context, is the practice of taking handfuls of prescription pills, such as OxyContin, Vicodin, or Xanax, with beer or hard liquor, with the goal of getting high. “Pharm parties” are becoming common for a number of reasons. It is not illegal to take prescription medications (if you have a prescription) and there is a misconception that prescription drugs are much safer than street drugs because they come from a doctor.

Parents need to know that they themselves are potential sources of prescription medications. Many people do not know how long a vial of prescription medications is viable, nor are they aware of the proper way to dispose of medications that are expired or have been in a household for a number of years. Remember, if you have had a vial of tablets or capsules for one year or more, it is time to get rid of them. Keeping pills around leads to risks such as child poisonings and potential theft for abuse.

Getting rid of your old medications is easy: simply grind them up or empty capsules into some coffee grounds or kitty litter. This will prevent curious kids or dumpster divers from getting at these unused medications. For your convenience, your local police station or fire department is equipped to dispose of medications properly. Do not flush your old pills down the toilet; it may be hard on the environment.

Talking with the teens and young adults in your life is critical. They need to know that abusing prescription medications is illegal and that mixing prescription medications can land them in the emergency room or even the morgue. In addition, there is evidence that once a person tries prescription medications in this manner, he or she is more likely to go on to experiment with more potentially addictive and deadly drugs, such as heroin.

The recent grant from the ISHP provides pharmacy students with some of the funds needed to purchase literature and other materials to assist with classroom workshops and information booths at health fairs. An elective class currently being offered this semester is designed to expand student’s knowledge on the topic and hone their counseling skills.

Jo Kiester is a fourth-year student at ISU College of Pharmacy’s Meridian campus. She will graduate in 2011.
Alumni Spotlight:

Dr. Joy Plein to be honored at ISU Homecoming

College of Pharmacy alumnae, Dr. Ellen Joy Plein is being honored with the Distinguished Alumnus Award during the Sept. 24 President’s Alumni Recognition Dinner for the 2010 ISU Homecoming.

The ISU Distinguished Alumnus Award recognizes exemplary professional and personal contributions resulting in national or international recognition. Plein earned her bachelor’s degree in pharmacy in 1947, the year University of Idaho — Southern Branch became Idaho State College. She earned a masters degree in pharmacy at the University of Washington in 1951 and a doctoral degree in 1956. In 1952, she married Dr. Elmer Plein, a professor at University of Washington.

She started her teaching career at University of Washington in 1954, and became a full professor in 1974. Plein has dedicated her career to geriatric pharmacy.

In 1973, Joy and Elmer Plein, with the help of a graduate student, developed a nursing home pharmacy course, which led to more courses in geriatric pharmacy and the establishment of the Certificate in Geriatric Pharmacy Practice.

In 1989, she and Elmer established a pharmacy teaching program at the Hearthstone, a Seattle continuing care retirement community.

Plein has served on panels at the national level, including the FDA’s OTC Review panel and the National Advisory on Health Professions Education.

Plein continues to conduct research and contributes to a number of courses on campus.

Dr. Ellen Joy Plein with Plein Memorial Scholarship recipients Crystal Shipley, Suzanne Tegland and Rubie Chase.

She has earned recognition in several venues, especially for her work with the geriatric population. In 2002, she received the Janssen ElderCare Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2001 she received the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists’ George F. Archambault award.

In 2004, she was honored with the ISU President’s Medalion. Plein has established three scholarship endowments at Idaho State in memory of three dear friends and classmates from the Class of 1947.

Take Time to Join Us:

College of Pharmacy & ISU Events

• ISU Homecoming Parade, Saturday, September 25, 10 am - Noon. Parade begins on the corner of First Avenue and Center St., then proceeds up Center St. and makes a right turn on 15th/Memorial Drive and comes to an end in the Holt Arena Parking Lot. For information on entering a vehicle in this year’s parade please call (208) 282-2297. Entry form deadline is September 17, 2010.

• ISU Homecoming Game, Sept. 25, Bengals vs. Northern Arizona, 3:35 p.m., Holt Arena. For more Homecoming events, see http://www.isu.edu/alumni/homecoming.shtml

• Pharmacy Recruiting Fair, Oct. 21 & 22, Pond Student Union. For additional information, see http://pharmacy.isu.edu/live/pharmFair/

For more information regarding pharmacy events, contact Andrew Gauss at 282-3393 or andrew@pharmacy.isu.edu