



DAVID LAWRENCE CENTER

FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

April is Alcohol Awareness Month; Education, Support and Solutions are the Paths to Hope, Health and Wellness

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*Guest Editorial Submitted By Scott Burgess, CEO
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Each April, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. sponsors Alcohol Awareness Month to increase public awareness and understanding, reduce stigma and encourage local communities to focus on alcoholism and alcohol-related issues. David Lawrence Center sees Alcohol Awareness Month as an opportunity to encourage people to make healthy, safe choices and educate our fellow citizens about the risks, facts and treatment solutions available for alcohol abuse and addiction so we can instill hope, offer help and strengthen the health, safety and wellness of our community.

Behind cigarettes, alcohol is one of the most dangerous substances commonly ingested. The CDC reports that alcohol kills 88,000 people per year in the United States and estimates the cost to the country is 224 billion dollars a year.

Drinking alcoholic beverages is often seen as a way to relax, socialize or celebrate, but drinking too much or drinking as a way of dealing with feelings of anxiety or depression can lead to devastating consequences. Drinking in excess increases your chances of being injured or even killed. Alcohol is a factor in about 60% of fatal burn injuries, drownings, and homicides; 50% of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults; and 40% of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides and fatal falls. In the long term, heavy alcohol use can lead to serious organ damage, memory problems, sleep disorders, difficulty managing diabetes, high blood pressure and many other conditions. Drinking during pregnancy can cause serious challenges for the baby including brain damage.

In addition to chronic, excessive drinking, intermittent binge drinking is also a major health issue. Binge drinking affects 38 million U.S. adults and even more alarming, according to the 2012 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 6.3 percent of middle school students and 17.7 percent of high school students surveyed in Collier County reported binge drinking – both statistics are higher than the state average.

Simply put, heavy use of alcohol creates significant ill-effects in terms of health, behavior and wellbeing. The impact of this crippling disease is far reaching and affects family, friends, employers and society as a whole. Consequences associated with alcohol abuse and addiction are vast and varied including medical, economic, criminal and social costs.

As Collier County's only comprehensive, not-for-profit mental health and substance abuse treatment facility, challenges associated with alcohol and addiction are of the utmost concern for the David Lawrence Center. An ever increasing number of our clients seeking substance abuse treatment – as much as 60% - also have a mental health diagnosis. Both conditions must be addressed for treatment to be optimally effective. Understanding the correlation is imperative. According to the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism, alcohol alters serotonin levels in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter used by the brain to regulate mood. Imbalances in serotonin are thought to cause mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder.

At David Lawrence Center, our board certified addictionologist and psychiatrists assess for both mental health and substance abuse conditions. Based on results, a host of effective treatments are available via our specialized addictions program, Crossroads. Services recommended may be outpatient individual or group counseling. Sometimes the appropriate treatment is a more intensive level of care such as inpatient medical detoxification and/or residential care. Our 2-4 week residential program takes a holistic, national best practice approach to treatment that includes: personalized lengths of stay; evidence-based therapies; innovative, adjunctive therapies such as art therapy, equine-facilitated therapy, yoga, pet therapy; individualized wellness education as well as structured fitness and recreation.

As a not-for-profit organization founded and governed by community leaders, the Center is dedicated to ensuring help is available to everyone in need. We realize seeking treatment is sometimes a challenging decision for individuals and families. As such we work very hard to break down real and artificial barriers to attaining treatment. We offer care at a cost few, if any, can match. We seek to work collaboratively with the whole family system. And we offer excellent, cutting-edge care in a comfortable and welcoming environment conducive for treatment success. In doing so, all can be engaged in the journey toward health and wellness.

So how can you help someone in need?

First, provide encouragement and hope. Many have been down the challenging roads of addiction and have found health and wellness. As long as someone is engaged in the recovery battle, there is great hope. Remind those struggling that they are not alone. One in nine Collier County residents experience some form of substance abuse and one in four will suffer a mental health problem. These are challenges that cut across all age, ethnicity and socioeconomic lines. Reinforce, they need not feel ashamed or embarrassed to obtain care. Just like all medical conditions, there should be no guilt involved in seeking treatment.

Next, act. Talk about it, the more we talk about it as a community, the more lives we can save. Seek a screenings through a primary care provider or obtain an evaluation via a substance abuse or mental health professional, attend a self-help group; do something to seek help.

David Lawrence Center offers free alcohol screenings where you can talk privately with a substance abuse professional and receive information about local resources. Those who need further evaluation will receive treatment referrals and recommendations. For more information about the screenings call a David Lawrence Center Crossroads Outreach Specialist at (239) 354-1428.

Scott Burgess is the Chief Executive Officer of the David Lawrence Center, the Southwest Florida-based, not-for-profit leading provider of innovative, behavioral health solutions including inpatient, outpatient, residential and community based prevention and treatment services for children, adults and families. For more information visit DavidLawrenceCenter.org.