

Spotlight On Rx Abuse

Coalitions Use a Variety of Strategies to Bottle Up Rx Abuse

What's the best prescription to address the alarming rates of prescription drug abuse? It's a combination of strategies that not only educate the public, but also reduce access and change social norms. That's what coalitions are doing across the country – working on everything from drug take-back programs and partnerships with clinicians and pharmacists to hosting educational events during October's National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month.

CADCA Ambassador and a Cherokee Nation prevention specialist Lindsey Roberts helped coordinate a collection of 100,000 pills during a recent take back event in Muskogee, Okla., a city of about 40,000 people. They are also sponsoring specially-printed homework folders for preschool to 6th graders with prescription drug facts and drug-free tips that include students' weekly assignments and bulletins for parent perusal.

"We are hoping by repeatedly seeing those messages from us, all school year, that parents will be familiar with the problem," said Roberts, who is with the Muskogee Community Anti-Drug Network in Muskogee, Okla.

Her coalition is also working on a pilot program with their local Lowe's home improvement store for installation of one locking kitchen or bathroom cabinet in all new home construction in their area in the hopes people will lock up their Rx medication. It could be a first step toward local policy work, Roberts said, noting that Oklahoma was the first state to restrict the availability of pseudoephedrine, a decongestant crucial in making meth, by moving certain non-prescription cold tablets such as Sinutab and Sudafed behind the pharmacy counter. For homes already built, Roberts said homeowners or renters can attend a free Saturday class at Lowe's on how to install a

lock in their cabinet.

The Alaska Safe Medicine Alliance, a program of the Seniors Behavioral Health Coalition, in Anchorage, Alaska, is employing similar strategies, partnering with parents, youth groups, senior citizens and environmental groups to promote the use of medicine lock boxes in the home. The recently formed coalition is also working with their local pharmacist association to make policy recommendations to the state legislature for an ongoing, state-wide disposal program.

Program Manager Mary Sullivan, who works for a senior organization, was able to bring all sectors together for the new coalition.

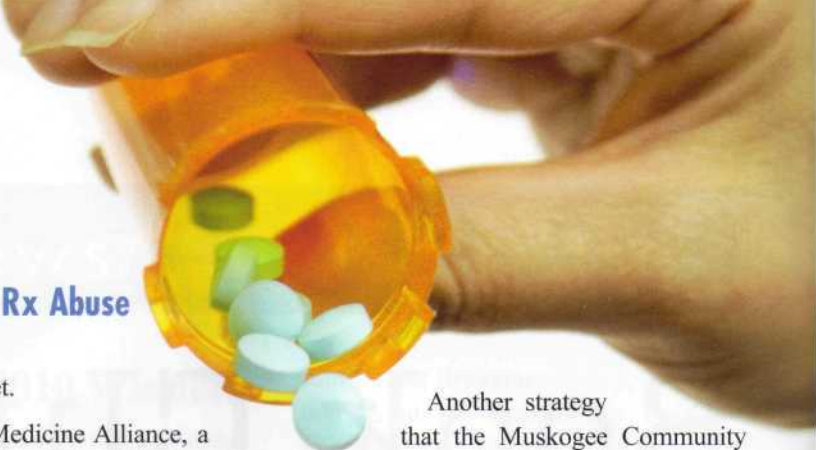
"The common denominator is that we all care about keeping everyone from abusing prescription drugs," she said.

In some of the remote parts of her state, Sullivan said proper drug disposal can be a problem. The coalition promoted its first drug dump with a large media campaign of paid advertising and interviews with reporters that appeared to be a good investment, she said.

"Our pilot event was held in April and we had a foot of snow later in the season than usual and we thought people weren't going to come out. In just three hours, we collected 121 pounds of medications. Some people drove two hours just to be there," Sullivan said.

Their second drug take back event, held in conjunction with the Drug Enforcement Agency's national event last month, collected more than 1300 pounds of prescription drugs at four sites. Sullivan was invited to speak at an international safe medicine symposium in Maine on Alaska's best practices.

"It's like we're riding a wave, and it's gaining momentum," she said.



Another strategy that the Muskogee Community Anti-Drug Network is working on to keep prescription medicines out of the hands of young people is to install a permanent prescription drop off box in their police station.

In surveys conducted by the coalition, almost everyone who abused prescription drugs received them from a family member, Roberts said. The problem, she noted, is that since it's not on the radar screens of a lot of parents it's easy for youth to obtain these medicines from their own medicine cabinet or from a relative's home. Another part of the problem is that people who need prescription medicines for legitimate purposes often share their medicines and hold on to them so that they don't have to buy more the next time they need it.

"Our campaign challenges belief systems and social norms," Roberts explained. Their coalition has made Rx misuse and abuse their primary focus and they continue to try to identify strategies to address this problem.

Coalition leader Tammany McDaniel understands the challenge of changing people's attitudes and practices regarding prescription drug abuse. McDaniel, Director of Community Initiatives for the Arizona Youth Partnership in Kingman, Ariz., has been able to bridge that communication divide by working with hospice providers who, in turn, coordinate the drop off of unused medications of a deceased relative at the police station. Police stations, then, regularly burn the drugs.

The coalition has collected more than 600 pounds of prescription drugs in their area; quite a feat for what McDaniel calls a "rural frontier." To get the word out about their take-back efforts, like Roberts, McDaniel

partners with their local newspaper. Also, McDaniel advertises the issue with flyers on pizza boxes and in grocery bags. They are also hosting a town hall meeting this month in the town of Globe, and want to expand the idea across the state.

"There is a perception that a prescription drug is not a "real" drug, that someone can't get addicted or overdose," McDaniel said. "People tell us, 'The doctor said this can be used.'"

Youth in Globe are working on developing prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse messages for parents and youth in their area to counter the norm and keep everyone aware of the dangers of prescription drug abuse, McDaniel said.

A policy change supported by CADCA was the Safe and Secure Drug Disposal Act which was signed into law in October. This law is intended to allow individuals to more easily and safely dispose of controlled substances while reducing the chance of diversion.

R. Gil Kerlikowske, Office of National Drug Control Policy Director, issued the following statement regarding the passage of the law.

"Prescription drug abuse is America's fastest-growing drug problem, and one largely fed by an unlikely source - Americans' medicine cabinets. The passage of the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act of 2010 will save lives by providing patients with safe, environmentally sound ways to dispose of unused or expired prescription drugs."

McDaniel agreed. "Globe is just ready for this to stop happening to their children. You can keep your child safe and when they go to school, it's there."

For helpful information on how to tackle prescription drug abuse in your community, download CADCA's *Rx Abuse Prevention Toolkit: From Awareness to Action*, located at: www.cadca.org/resources/detail/rx-abuse-prevention-toolkit.

Visit CADCA's website for more information about National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month. ■