

Experts say alcoholism rising among young people

By CHRIS NEWKUMET
Collegian Staff Writer

Jeff had just taken an important mid-term exam. He knew he had not done well. The long hours of study and anxiety didn't seem worth it. To ease his depression he turned to a bottle of Jack Daniel's Bourbon Whiskey. He drank three quarters of it.

"Nothing better than Jack," he remarked later. "If I had done well I would have been up already and it would have been more of a celebration. I guess it was just a form of relief."

According to experts on alcohol abuse, Jeff is drinking for the wrong reason and could be getting himself into a behavioral pattern that someday, if it hasn't already, could lead to a serious drinking problem.

Jeff is not alone. Experts say that alcoholism, the nation's number three disease, is on the rise, especially among young people.

Dr. Robert Wirag, health education director of Health Services, says students are unconsciously developing behavioral patterns concerning alcohol that can lead to abuse. "An undergrad who blows a test and then goes out and gets bombed is getting himself into a behavioral pattern unconsciously. Later on in life as problems come, unconsciously he escapes as he did as an undergrad."

Wirag says the reasons people drink are very important in determining whether they are developing a drinking problem. "If a person is drinking to solve a problem, this is abusive drinking," he says.

According to Norman Brown, director of On Drugs, Inc., a drug counseling and treatment center in State College, the Centre Region also is experiencing an upward trend in alcohol abuse.

Statistics collected by On Drugs for a four-month period ending this September show twice the number of calls and emergencies, potential or actual, related to alcohol this year, compared to the same period last year. Brown says the Bellefonte counseling service shows the same type of increase.

"The Centre Region is located in a rural area and rural areas traditionally have a higher rate of alcoholism compared with the rest of the nation," Brown explains. "And the University, being located in the region, adds to the spectrum of the problem with its own characteristics, which are different from those of rural areas."

Brown sees the characteristics of a university town as being conducive to abusive drinking.

State College lacks alternatives for social interaction that do not center on or include alcohol. The noisy, crowded atmosphere of most bars and parties in State College are not appropriate for moderate drinking, he says. These situations do not lend themselves to sitting and communicating with other people. The focus is on the drinking as an end in itself and the alternatives for people to get away from pressures are just not present in State College, Brown says.

The college scene is an extremely transient one, according to Brown, where many different types of people are thrown together for a short time. The building of relationships with other people is not easy for some students in this situation. The lack of alternatives for social interaction that do not include alcohol only compounds the problem, as it makes it difficult for people to meet other people without being subjected in some way to alcohol.

Another contributing factor to the higher incident rate of alcohol abuse in the area was the recent marijuana drought along the east coast this past summer. When kids can't get marijuana, they turn to alcohol, Brown says.

According to Wirag, alcohol is part of the social spirit among young people today at the University.

"To college students living away from home for the first time, drinking is a symbol of social freedom. There has been a shifting of emphasis among the youth from the use of other drugs as socially accepted vehicles, to alcohol, which is more accepted by the rest of society," he says.

It's not hard to see how young people have realized the acceptability of alcohol over other drugs, according to William Eck, health education professor and board member



mitories), alcohol is still easier and cheaper to get," Eck says. "Even for students not of legal age, obtaining alcohol doesn't seem to be a problem. Of those under-age drinkers asked, all said that they could easily get one of their legal-aged friends to purchase alcohol, or they could wait in front of a liquor store or beer distributor and could easily persuade people entering the stores to purchase alcoholic beverages for them."

The feelings that students have concerning themselves and their futures also affects the problem.

The pressures felt by young people today, especially college students, have contributed to the rise in the rate of abuse, according to Lianne Scherr, State College psychotherapist. "The use of alcohol by college students today reflects the kind of concern that they are feeling about their futures. In 1965 no one worried about finding a job. The economic situation was different. Now they have to find something. They are worried about it. This brings on internal tensions best relieved by alcohol."

According to Wirag, the lack of education on the effects of alcohol is part of the problem. "We should accept the fact that alcohol is here to stay. We should be educating our young people to drink responsibly, if they are going to drink. People just don't realize what alcohol can do to you."

Wirag recalled an incident this past summer when a Penn State undergraduate guzzled a half-gallon bottle of Southern Comfort Whiskey on a bet. He was rushed to the Mountainview unit of Centre Community Hospital and was put on a machine to clean the alcohol out of his blood. Ritenour Health Center officials confirmed that he was minutes away from death when he reached the hospital. He was lucky; he spent only a week in a coma. He had never thought of alcohol as a poison, Wirag said.

Eck says that society must be made aware of alcohol as a drug and as a problem, if the situation is to improve. Getting people to understand alcohol and its use has been the biggest obstacle in his work with the National Council on Alcoholism. "We've spent 15 years just trying to convince people that alcoholism is a disease."

of the National Council on Alcoholism.

"Think of the difference in parents' reactions if they caught their child drinking as opposed to their reaction if they caught him smoking marijuana. The youngster knows that his parents would be less upset if he were caught drinking. They might even laugh it off."

Wirag also credits an educational process for the shift of preference among young people. "Young people have become more intelligent. They don't trust the pusher anymore. They are less likely to subject themselves to possible physical harm from a drug that is something other than what they were told it was by the pusher."

According to statistics gathered by On Drugs, which is involved with drug analysis, half of the drugs sold on the street today are not what they are supposed to be.

The availability of alcohol also is a major factor in the trend, Eck says.

"Even today at Penn State with the increased surveillance (a new, stricter policy concerning the use of alcohol in dor-

Peer program seeks volunteer educators

By KIM SMITH
Collegian Staff Writer

Today is the last day to apply for volunteer training in the Peer Contraceptive Education Program (PCEP) for this year.

PCEP volunteers are trained during Winter Term, and commit themselves to be peer educators for one term or longer, depending on their qualifications. Terri Kinney, PCEP student director said, "The training encompasses

information on contraceptives, procedures, and education skills.

Peer educators will receive two hours of academic credit next term for the first time, Kinney said.

PCEP volunteers are educators, not counselors, Kinney said. While some of the peer educators have counselor training, others do not. Peer educators can be used for information bases,

she said, and can usually refer persons with questions to the proper source.

PCEP began in 1974 after the state passed a law allowing physicians to prescribe contraceptives for minors without parental consent.

Ritenour Health Center received so many women requesting contraceptives, that gynecologists spent more time counseling them than treating women with medical problems, Kinney said.

The PCEP program was begun so that peers with reliable training could educate each other using the same information that the physicians would use.

Women sometimes resent having to attend the program, Kinney said, but it gives them reliable information on alternate forms of birth control.

Generally, programs are run by a male and a female counselor, because birth control is the responsibility of both partners, not just the woman, Kinney said.

The program is divided into three parts: an explanation of the doctor's examination, a discussion of the pros and cons of different birth control methods with a demonstration of their proper use, and making a doctor's appointment for the women who attend the program.

Fourth threat yields no culprit

Classes closed for bomb scare

A bomb threat to the Human Development Building yesterday morning caused some classes to be cancelled between 10 a.m. and noon, according to University Campus Security Officer Neil Grey.

He said the bomb threat was the fourth scare in three weeks, and in every case the threat was for approximately the same period of time.

The motive is not known at this time, Grey said.

One Human Development professor of a class which meets every Thursday from 10 a.m. to noon said he thinks someone must have a grudge against someone in the department.

He and his students cancelled class four times this term, he said, and his students are becoming angry. They have lost nearly ten per cent of their class time, he added.

Signs were posted on every entrance to the classroom

building notifying persons of the threat and its duration, Dean Ford of the Human Development Department said. It has been the option of the students and professors whether to have class or not.

"We take the position that there is no penalty for any student who decides not to attend class at that time," Ford said.

In 1969 or 1970 there were nine or ten bomb threats a day, according to Grey. He said they apprehended a

female responsible for those threats, and it appeared that her motive was simply to be disruptive.

He said he feels confident that the University police will apprehend someone in this case. They have ways of tracking down the anonymous caller, he added.

The penalty for making a bomb threat is five years in prison or \$10,000 fine, according to the Pennsylvania Crime Code.

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