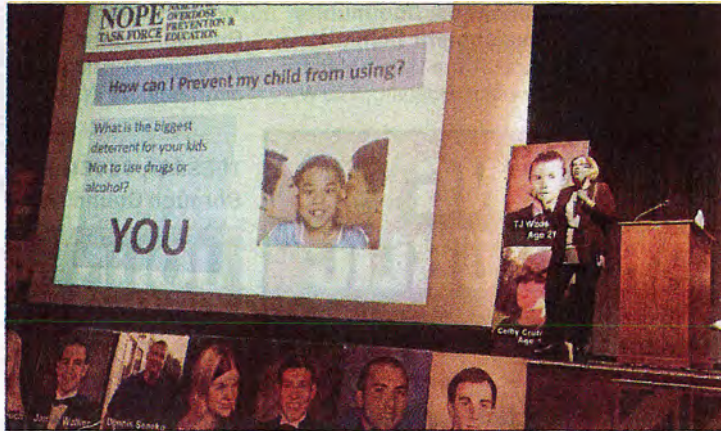


Keeping kids safe

NOPE presentations bring powerful message to UMAHS

UPPER MERION » As Upper Merion Area High School students filed into the auditorium for their Red Ribbon Week assembly, they saw the stage lined with dozens of large photos of teens and young adults who died as a result of accidental overdoses. During the presentation, the students learned that each victim would be alive today if someone had tried to get help or called 9-1-1. “Be the Hero, tell someone. Make the call,” urged Bridget Marley, a presenter for the Narcotics Overdose Prevention Education Task



Beth Mingey from Holcomb Behavioral Health talks to parents about how they can help prevent overdoses.

Force. “When it comes to drugs and alcohol, one plus one does not always equal two,” Marley told the students. “When drugs are combined or taken with alcohol...”

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Exam for accused baby kidnapper requested

Prosecutors ask judge to order Chesco woman to cooperate with psychiatrist

By Carl Hessler Jr.
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NORRISTOWN » Prosecutors have asked a judge to order a Chester County woman to cooperate with a prosecution psychiatrist seeking to evaluate her mental condition now that she has hinted she was legally insane when she allegedly kidnapped a baby from its mother at the King of Prussia Plaza shopping complex.

In court papers filed Monday, Montgomery County Assistant District Attorney Brianna Ringwood asked Judge William R. Carpenter to order Cheri

Amoore to appear and cooperate at a Nov. 9 examination by Dr. John S. O’Brien at the county detective bureau in Norristown. Ringwood suggested that defense lawyer Marc Steinberg and a detective may be present during the examination.

Ringwood indicated in court papers she is seeking the judge’s order because the parties have failed to reach an agreement regarding O’Brien’s proposed examination of Amoore.

“Specifically, where a criminal defendant has provided notice of his/her intent to assert an insanity defense at trial, the

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hol, one plus one can equal twenty-two! The effects of each drug can be multiplied, increasing the risk of overdose and death," Marley explained. She drove home the point that "Just one time could kill you."

The assembly was meant to be grim, emotionally evocative, and demanding of the students' attention. During the presentation, students heard real stories about teens who lost their lives. They heard from law enforcement officers and from family members who lost loved ones. Officer Andrew Parkins from Upper Providence Township played a real recording of a 9-1-1 call from a distraught mother who found her 17-year-old son's lifeless body in his bed. He showed them a body bag and told them that its zipper was the last sound that mother heard as her son's body was carried out of the house. Students heard from a tearful Marissa Wadsworth, whose son, T.J., died of a heroin overdose at age 21. "He was a wonderful boy who went on five mission trips with his church youth group. When he was in 9th grade, I suspected he was smoking pot. He laughed off my concerns, and by 10th grade, he was drinking alcohol and getting high on the weekends with his friends," Wadsworth told the silent audience. "The alcohol and marijuana compromised his brain and impaired his ability to make good decisions. In his senior year, he took a pill while under the in-

fluence of alcohol and marijuana. That one pill sealed his fate," said Wadsworth through her tears. According to Wadsworth, T.J.'s drug use escalated and by 21, he died of a heroin overdose, just four days after leaving a rehabilitation facility.

At the conclusion of the presentation, students were asked to leave in silence out of respect for those who lost their lives. In some classrooms, the somber mood prevailed as students processed the powerful message. In other classrooms, students wanted to discuss and process the message with their teachers. Some students needed to seek guidance from the school's counselors.

The NOPE presenters repeated the message that evening for parents and community members. The evening presentation also included a special parenting component. "Stay on them, even when they give you one word answers," Deputy Sheriff Joe Holman told the parents. He outlined the risks of underage drinking and marijuana use on a teen's brain, which is not developed until age 24. Beth Mingey, director of Holcomb Behavioral Health, described the warning signs of drug use and explained how to talk to teens who are exhibiting signs of use. "YOU are the single biggest deterrent to drug use," Mingey told the parents. "Stay connected with your kids. Talk with them, and present clear, no use expectations." "Drug use can happen in the best of families," Mingey explained. According to Mingey, addiction is a problem with chem-

istry, not a problem with character. She said that when a family has a history of addiction, there is a greater likelihood that the child will develop an addiction problem. It is important for children to know that their chemistry may make them more susceptible to addiction.

All of the presenters stressed the misuse of prescription drugs. Mingey gave the parents a homework assignment - Go home and assess your medication cabinet. If any of the drugs are expired or no longer needed, take them to a prescription drug drop box at the police station. Take stock of medicines that you are keeping. Take notice of size, appearance, and special markings so that you would notice if someone replaced one of the pills with a different pill. Count the pills in your medicine cabinet. For the best safety measures, keep your medicines in a locked box.

"We were hoping for a large turnout for the parent presentation," said Susan Shelton, who arranged for the NOPE presentations. "We only had about 20 parents in attendance. Hopefully, they will help spread the word about NOPE. Montgomery County has seen a 138 percent increase in the number of overdoses in the past year. We are hoping that educating students and parents will help prevent more tragedies." Please visit www.nopetaskforce.org for more information.

Submitted by Maria Villagracia, Upper Merion Area School District