

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



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As a participant in the Kentucky League of Cities recent Drug Summit, I was once again reminded of the heavy toll that prescription drug abuse is taking on communities across Kentucky. Many city officials shared their personal and heartfelt stories of how prescription pill abuse is devastating local families, straining the resources of local law enforcement, hospitals, schools and impacting economic development. It is chipping away at the foundation of our communities and preventing Kentucky from being all that it can be.

Those of us on the front line of this battle know that we cannot “arrest” our way out this problem. It is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted response; of which public education is a key component.

A year ago, I joined with two mothers from Morehead, Ky., Dr. Karen Shay and Lynn Kissick, and several state and law enforcement agencies to launch a statewide initiative to warn Kentucky kids about the dangers of prescription drug abuse. To date, our Keep Kentucky Kids Safe program has reached more than 5,000 students in a dozen school districts from Bowling Green to Ashland.

In the coming weeks, I’ll be on the road again to let Kentucky kids know the dangers of abusing prescription pills. The bottom line is that non-medical use of prescription pills can kill you. Overdose deaths in Kentucky have doubled in recent years. On average, 82 people die monthly from overdose of legal and illegal substances. More people are dying from drug overdoses than car accidents — meaning our medicine cabinets are more deadly than our highways.

I continue to be moved and inspired by the students we meet at our prevention assemblies. At the same time, I am stunned by the response I get when I ask students “how many of you know someone who has abused prescription pills?” Nearly 80 percent of the kids raise their hands. All but a few of the hands go down when I ask if their parents secure and monitor prescription drugs in their home.

As we travel to more schools this fall, we will also invite students to let us know how this problem has affected them. High school students will have an opportunity to win some great prizes by creating a video Public Service Announcement (PSA) on prescription drug abuse. The National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) has generously donated an Apple iPad for the first place winner. The runner-up will receive a \$100 Amazon.com gift card donated by the Kentucky Pharmacists Association. For an example of a video PSA, please see last year’s winning video by Bardstown High School’s John Andrew Stone: <http://youtu.be/VxwyZqBtOfs>

I also encourage parents to sit down with their children and watch a short video that we produced with Lynn and Karen about how prescription pill abuse has forever changed their families. The National Red Ribbon Week, a drug prevention initiative, is the last week in October and a perfect time to begin a dialogue with your kids about pill abuse. <http://youtu.be/XM5p2J5Cz3A>

For more information on our efforts to combat the abuse of prescription drugs in Kentucky and our video PSA contest, please visit my Stop Rx Abuse page at ag.ky.gov.

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