

Monthly Columns

by Attorney General Jack Conway



September 2010

In my travels across Kentucky, I have had a hard time finding a single family that has not been affected by prescription drug abuse. I have seen firsthand how it is devastating families in every corner of the Commonwealth.

In Morehead, Sam and Lynn Kissick did everything they could to help their daughter, Savannah, whose recreational use of prescription drugs had turned into addiction. The Kissicks' watched helplessly as the pills robbed them of their beautiful, outgoing daughter. They are among a growing number of Kentucky families whose lives have been shattered by prescription drug abuse.

In 2009, Savannah Kissick was among the 530 confirmed prescription drug overdose deaths in Kentucky. She was just 22 years old, and like many of our youth today, she began abusing prescription drugs in her early teens.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five teenagers today is using prescription drugs for non-medical purposes. That's up from one in 10 just three years ago. As Attorney General and as a father, I am alarmed by these statistics. And our kids aren't getting the prescription drugs in back alleys or on street corners; they're getting them at home from their parents' medicine cabinets.

In September, I joined with the Kentucky Justice Cabinet and its Office of Drug Control Policy, Kentucky Pharmacists Association, Operation UNITE, the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators (NADDI) and concerned parents to launch a statewide initiative to educate Kentucky teens and their families about the dangers prescription drugs can pose when used without a doctor's order.

We received a warm welcome from school officials and students at Frankfort's Western Hills High School when we announced the program last month. I look forward to personally delivering this important message to middle school and high school students in Northern Kentucky and Fayette County in October.

I'm also encouraging Kentucky's middle and high school students to participate in our statewide Public Service Announcement (PSA) competition. Students are asked to submit 30 to 45 second PSAs about the perils of prescription drug abuse. Winners will receive an Apple iPad or iPod Touch, donated by the Kentucky Pharmacists Association and NADDI of Kentucky. The winning videos will be featured on my website.

Additionally, we'll be distributing informational posters to pharmacies and other locations across Kentucky to alert the public to the importance of monitoring and locking-up prescription drugs in the home and safely disposing of expired or unneeded medications. I recently assisted at one of the more than 70 prescription drug take-back sites in Kentucky on Sept. 25 and was pleased to see so many people disposing of their unneeded medications.

I would also like to encourage you to watch a video my office produced featuring Lynn Kissick and Dr. Karen Shay, also of Morehead, who share their heartbreaking stories of the heavy toll prescription drug abuse has taken on their families. I hope you can take a few moments to watch this video, particularly with your children.

I appreciate the support I've received from these two very courageous moms, as well as Justice Secretary J. Michael Brown, Representative John Tilley of Hopkinsville and the many school officials, community leaders and concerned parents who have contacted me to discuss this problem.

For more information on our prescription drug abuse education initiative as well as the work we have already done to combat the illegal trafficking of prescription drugs through my statewide Drug Diversion Task Force, please visit <http://ag.ky.gov/rxabuse>.

Working together, we can ensure a safer and brighter future for Kentucky kids.

Jack Conway
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