

Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs

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ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH: A DOCTORS CALL TO ACTION

Augusta, ME – April is Alcohol Awareness Month and one important step in awareness is to screen for alcohol and other drug problems. Screening and Brief Interventions (SBI) are a critical tool for medical and health care professionals. Routine SBI's could save lives while assisting individuals seeking medical attention in Emergency Rooms get the help they need. According to a 2008 report from the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, SBI is one of the top 5 cost saving reductions ¹

Dr. George Dreher who has worked as a Family physician, an Emergency Department physician, as a Psychiatrist, and in Addiction Medicine released an open letter to the medical and health care community in Maine. In his remarks, Dr. Dreher addresses some of the major problems we face as a state and as a society around alcohol and other drug use and abuse.

How common is the problem? According to a National Household Survey:

- 29% of Maine youth age 12-20 drink and 20% binge drink
- 7.59% of people 12 and older meet the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse and 3.17% meet the criteria for drug dependence or abuse
- 14% of people 18-25 have used a prescription pain reliever non-medically

Maine is one of only seven states where past month use of any illicit drug *other* than marijuana exceed 10%. Compared to Maine:

- only four states have a higher drug dependence rate for people 18-25
- only three states have a higher drug dependence rate for people 12-17
- only two states have greater rates of past month marijuana use among 12-17 year olds

“Having primary care providers, emergency departments, and other healthcare professionals asking the right questions about alcohol and drug use every time can save lives ” Ruth Blauer, Executive Director of the Maine Association of Substance Abuse Program remarked.

And she is right. Dr. Dreher concludes his letter by stating “Patients often try to change their substance use habits because a health care provider educates them about the associated risks and expresses concern for their health. If the patient is unable to reduce or quit their use then you can refer them to professional treatment. “

One resource is Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician's Guide with Free CME/CE Credits (NIAAA) www.niaaa.nih.gov/Publications/EducationTrainingMaterials/CME_CE.htm

Dr. Dreher closes his letter with a call to action “Your intervention in these individuals’ substance use may improve not only their health but the emotional health of those around them, reduce health care costs, and improve the safety of your community”

The Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs, Inc. (MASAP) is a non-profit membership organization recognized state-wide and nationally as the voice of substance abuse and addictions in Maine. MASAP represents and advocates for the continuum of substance abuse and addictions services throughout Maine, from prevention through treatment to recovery. To learn more about MASAP please call 207-621-8118 or visit us at www.masap.org

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¹ February 2008 *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. [Doctors Underestimate the Power of Screening for Problem Drinking.](#)