

Parents told of dangers of opioid addiction at forum

By **LISA TALLYN**
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About 80 people learned about the dangers of opioid addiction from two Halton parents who lost sons to accidental overdoses of OxyContin at a session at Georgetown District High School recently.

The "do you KnOw?" Opiate Awareness Evening for Parents was put on by the school's parent council and featured local resident Betty-Lou Kristy, whose 25-year-old son Peter (Kristy) Beattie died 10 years ago from an accidental mixed drug overdose, and Bill Robinson of Oakville, whose son James, 24, died of an accidental OxyContin drug overdose in 2010.

Halton Regional Police Det. Const. John MacKinnon also spoke about when legal drugs become illegal.

Georgetown resident Kristy said she wanted to applaud the parent council for being brave enough to bring the topic to parents.

She said her son was "absolutely the love of my life."

"There are no words to describe the loss of a child."

Once youths are trapped into OxyContin addiction "it's a long hard road to get back," said Kristy.

Youth look at the drug, Kristy said, as a "safe high" and wrongly assume it to be safe because it's prescribed.

"It traps people because the withdrawal makes you incredibly ill," said Kristy. "It impacts all walks of life, all ages, from youth

right through to seniors."

She said her son "fell into the trap of escaping the mantle of emotional pain through alcohol and prescription pain medication."

He was prescribed OxyContin and Percocet for gastrointestinal pain, but found the drugs also alleviated his mental and emotional pain. She said she wasn't aware of the volume of drugs he was taking, but he did eventually tell her about the depth of his addiction and how he had tried to stop.

But, Kristy said, due to the severe withdrawal symptoms, it is something that can't be just stopped.

She tried to find help for her son, but couldn't.

In 2001 her son ended up in psychiatric care and OxyContin, mixed with psychiatric drugs, proved to be a lethal combination.

Robinson's son died in May 2010.

Robinson said he didn't "know how to describe the horror of finding my son dead in his bedroom that Saturday morning or the anguish of knowing I couldn't help him anymore."

His son James took some of the leftover painkillers Robinson had from previous surgery after he was hit in the mouth with a bat while playing softball.

Four months after James died, James's 21-year-old friend also died of an Oxycon-



BETTY-LOU KRISTY

tin overdose.

He decided to do some research and found that death from drug overdose had completely surpassed drunk driving. He also found that the 19-24 year-olds were the age group most affected.

In 2009 the CAMH Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey revealed that use of upload medication among students ranked third behind alcohol and cannabis. In Canada Oxycontin-related deaths increased nine fold between 1991 and 2006 in Ontario.

Robinson said his son had been attending a methadone clinic to get off the Oxycontin. He relapsed several times but he kept trying, he said.

He said his son tried to find a treatment program, but as an adult it would take several months to get into a detoxification centre. He stressed the need for these programs to be more available.

MacKinnon said, "We can't arrest our way out of prescription drug addiction."

He said police aren't the answer and are only part of the big picture. He added the number of deaths from opioids are higher than cocaine and heroin combined.

MacKinnon said parents need to ask questions of their kids when they find baggies of pills, pill bottles or blank prescription pads in their home.

MacKinnon recommended parents go

online and search for developmental assets that could play a role in keeping kids off drugs. They include parental involvement in schooling, a community that values youth, high expectations and creative activities.

Education of parents and physicians about prescription drug addiction is important said MacKinnon, as is enforcement by police and proper drug disposal.

An audience member asked what some of the signs of opioid use were.

Kristy said in her son's case he previously had anxiety, but when he was using, she said he was "all of a sudden very happy." Later, he spent a lot of time in the bathroom and was often violently ill. Robinson said his son lost weight.

Kaitlyn Walsh, an addictions counselor, said an addicted person may lose interest in work, school, friends and just go "into themselves."

Robinson said he and Kristy want to get into the schools to talk to the students about the issue, but they can't get in unless they're invited.

"The school trustees, principals are frightened to have anyone come into the school— and rightly so— where they do not know what the message is," said Robinson.

So, he said, they're taking a different approach, by coming to the parents, service clubs with grandparents.

"If you want us in the schools, you'll get us in the schools, but you have to do it because we've tried and we can't."

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