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Work policies, treatment, keys to busting meth, drug addiction

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When people think of methamphetamine addicts, or other drug addicts, they often picture the scruffy guy on the street or those they've seen on educational videos raging out of control from an overdose.

They don't necessarily picture a co-worker, or even their boss.

Yet three-quarters of those suffering from a substance abuse problem in Douglas County are members of the work force, a particularly troublesome reality for employers, said John Gardin II, behavioral health services director at ADAPT, a drug abuse treatment program in Roseburg.

"They are your employees, whether you like it or not," Gardin told the audience at Monday's Roseburg Area Chamber of Commerce monthly forum at the Douglas County Fairgrounds.

In an effort to help raise awareness about meth abuse in Douglas County, the chamber hosted speakers to discuss the drug and its effects on the community.

"I don't think anybody realizes how prevalent it is," said Chamber President Alison Eggers, after the meeting. "... It's professional, all levels."

In the workplace, Gardin said, people with substance abuse problems have been shown to be five times more likely to file for workers' compensation and are generally one-third as productive as their sober counterparts.

Luckily, he said, treatment works. Many might relapse, but Gardin compares it to the relapse rates for other chronic diseases with soundly accepted treatments like diabetes and hypertension. They are similar, he said.

"It's about personal change," he said, referring primarily to lifestyle choices, "And none of us are too keen on change."

Change can be especially difficult for someone who's bottomed out on drugs, he said.

Unfortunately when it comes to meth addicts specifically, the length of the typical out-patient treatment program



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John Gardin II, director of behavioral health services for ADAPT, talks about methamphetamine and its effects on employees during the Roseburg Area Chamber of Commerce Noon Forum at the Douglas County Fairgrounds Monday. **MICHELLE ALAIMO / N-R staff photo**

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falls short.

It can take up to 180 days or more for a meth addict to get back to functioning fully, to the point where treatment can start to have an effect, he said. The resources aren't there to serve everyone to the fullest.

That's one reason programs like Drug Court are so important, Gardin told the forum audience. Douglas County's Drug Court over the past five years has shown about a 2 percent recidivism rate, or rate at which people re-offend. That's compared to the statewide average of 10 to 12 percent, also considered successful.

The local Residential Substance Abuse Treatment program, RSAT, has about a 10 percent recidivism rate, compared to Gardin's estimated 64 percent rate for felons with drug histories coming out of the Department of Corrections.

When it comes to the local work force, Gardin said treatment officials are ready to pair with employers to loosen the grip meth and other drugs have on the community.

Also addressing the forum, Jon McAmis, human resources and training director at Roseburg Forest Products, said having a comprehensive drug policy is key to maintaining a safe, efficient and productive work force. Yet few employers have made use of such programs.

"It gives you a competitive advantage," he said.

Supervisors should be trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse, and employees should be educated and offered assistance programs in case they need to seek help.

And, McAmis said, drug testing should be on employees' minds.

"That alone, I think, sends a strong message to the work force," he said.

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