

Breaking down barriers

'Cocaine is in a class by itself,' doctor says

By Casey Hane
staff writer

FARMINGTON AREA professionals treating cocaine addicts say the drug's usage has crossed socio-economic boundaries because of the purified, smoked version known on the street as "crack."

Previously an upper middle class addiction because of the illegal drug's high cost, the purified version — sold in small pieces, or rocks — has become an extremely addictive \$10 high.

It's so addictive, there is a nine-month life expectancy for an addict who does not obtain treatment. It has become a booming \$200 billion industry, according to experts.

"Cocaine is in a class by itself," said Dr. Morris Fineman, a Livonia physician and head of the 18-bed chemical dependency unit at Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills. "The demographic barriers we once thought were there are not."

Fineman speculated that the refined form of cocaine being sold on the street today is "probably cheaper than marijuana."

SMOKING, OR freebasing cocaine, carries the drug to the user's brain within four to eight seconds, according to Fineman and Tom Ghena, cocaine therapist from Maplegrove, a West Bloomfield treatment facility for chemically dependent people.

"The addiction is quicker — a more intense form," Ghena said. "It goes from the lungs to the heart and brain in eight seconds."

Fineman estimates that smoking the drug takes it to the brain within four seconds, compared with the traditional snorting method, which takes the drug through the bloodstream and might take 10-12 seconds.

With dealers perfecting the crack process, users are becoming addicted more readily, the health and

'The addiction (from smoking cocaine) is quicker — a more intense form. It goes from the lungs to the heart and brain in eight seconds . . . Their (addicts') drug hunger is extremely intense — they come in with a lot of drug hunger.'

— Tom Ghena,
cocaine therapist
Maplegrove

counseling professionals said.

It was not uncommon for users to purify the cocaine themselves, but "dealers started saying, 'No problem, I'll cook it up for you,'" Ghena said.

COCAINE IS obtained from coca leaves. In a powder form, it is usually diluted for use. A smokable form is made by preparing a watery solution of cocaine, ammonia and sometimes baking soda, which is heated until it vaporizes, according to published medical information.

The hardened drug can then be smoked or crushed and mixed with tobacco. The slang term "crack" refers to the sound made by crystals popping when heated.

Because more people are now using cocaine in the smokable form, more are seeking help from treatment centers, of which there are few, Ghena said. Users receive everything from drug treatments at Botsford to reverse the drug's affects, to various group therapy sessions.

Maplegrove is part of the Henry Ford Hospital complex in West Bloomfield Township. It has both in-

patient and out-patient services. Cocaine users are treated mainly on an in-patient basis, because of the uniqueness of the drug's euphoric high and depressive low as it wears off.

Both facilities are trying out-patient treatment for cocaine addiction. Botsford opened an out-patient program this past summer. Maplegrove is scheduled to open one early in 1987.

IT HAS been only three years since professionals began special treatment for cocaine addicts in the Farmington and West Bloomfield areas, Ghena said.

They are still learning methods of treatment. And they're finding that changes in the type of person using the drug will affect their therapy techniques.

The typical cocaine user was single, from early 20s to early 30s in age and just beginning a career. With the less expensive form of the drug being sold today, that has changed.

Maplegrove puts all drug users and alcoholic patients through a general treatment for chemical dependency. Since it began in 1983, Maplegrove has been exploring ways to enhance the program for those addicted to cocaine.

When Maplegrove began its specialized cocaine treatment program, 25 percent of those patients comprised the total patient group. Today, Ghena estimates cocaine addicts represent 40-50 percent of the facility's in-patients.

TREATING SOMEONE addicted to cocaine presents two major problems, Ghena said.

First, he said, addicts "have a hard time seeing the global picture of addiction."

They looked down at alcoholics as bums when treated in the same therapy program, he said.

"They have very little doubt they can't control the drug," he added.

"They're late baby boomers with a really different mentality."

The second problem is the compulsion to use the drug. "Their drug hunger is extremely intense — they come in with a lot of drug hunger," Ghena said.

"COCAINE USERS are always chasing that street high," Fineman said.

Fineman explained that cocaine "releases neurotransmitters in the brain" causing "a euphoric high that is almost orgasmic."

The medication given at Botsford replaces the neurotransmitters and "makes it harder to get a high," he said.

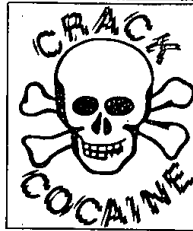
As with treating any addiction,

"we need to have them (addicts) identify and readily admit" their addiction, Fineman said.

There are 50,000 to 60,000 known addicts in the Detroit area, he said. He estimated the cocaine problem is costing the state \$10 billion in treatment and to "repair the damage" caused by the drug.

FINEMAN CALLED cocaine the "Cadillac of drugs" because of the exhilarating high a user gets. He believes the ultimate answer to the overall problem is education.

"We have to show people, 'Yes, we can treat it with a positive outcome,' and we need a highly sophisticated education program beginning at kindergarten," Fineman said.

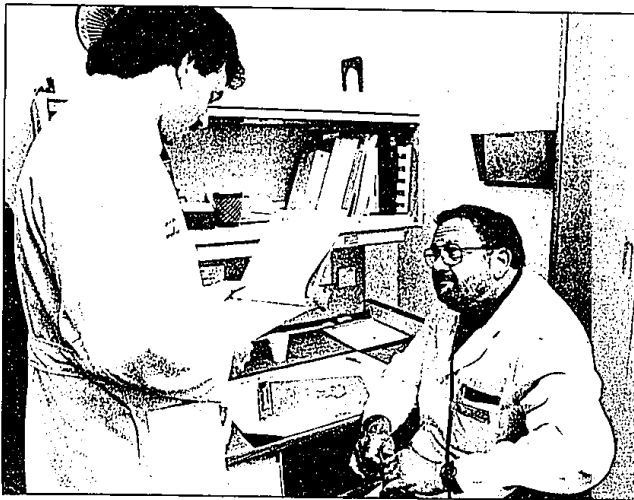


Everyone in society, from parents to health and education professionals, has a responsibility to teach, he said.

Although Fineman predicts the cocaine addiction problem will grow steadily, Ghena expects cocaine smoking to lose its social appeal during the next few years.

"Freebase will very quickly lose its myth and social status," Ghena said.

"Cocaine used to be considered hard core — it will be again."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Dr. Jeff Rosenbaum (left) discusses a case with Dr. Morris Fineman, director of the Botsford General Hospital chemical dependency program.



NICK SMITH/staff photographer

Farmington Hills detective Pat Monti shows a variety of paraphernalia used for producing and using the purified version of cocaine known as crack.

campus pipeline

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IN CONCERT

Six students in the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Oberlin College, Ohio, presented the annual orienta-

tion concert for the new enrollees and their parents Sept. 3.

Sharon Takacs, daughter of Ronald Sanford of Farmington and Helen Bennett of Huntington Woods, is a senior majoring in voice performance at Oberlin College's Conservatory of Music, where she is studying singing with Professor Beverly Rinaldi.

She was commended by the Toledo Blade for her performance as a soloist with the Toledo Choral Society in the 1985 presentation of Handel's "Messiah."

She portrayed Susanna in the 1986 conservatory winter-term production of Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro" and performed as a soloist with Oberlin's Musical Union and the Oberlin Chamber Orchestra in a spring 1986 presentation of Haydn's "Nelson Mass."

Takacs also performed leading roles in productions of "Hansel and Gretel" and "The Secret Marriage" at the University of Michigan, where she was formerly a student. She is married to Oberlin pianoforte Professor Peter Takacs.

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