

Pilot program tackles female drug abuse

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

What makes women who abuse cocaine different from men? The question is of paramount importance to a handful of suburban women participating in a state-funded pilot program and who hope to gain a better understanding of dependence upon cocaine, the illicit drug ruining their lives.

"Identifying women's issues which are barriers to treatment," is the question at hand, according to Rosalie Schwartz of Eastwood Clinic. Schwartz conceived the clinic's new program — Choosing Healthy Options: Investing in Cocaine Elimination, dubbed CHOICE.

Gathering in a small, inviting office on Woodward Avenue near Birmingham, a dozen women from Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties ponder their addictions in the ar-

duous task of recovery. Child care and transportation are provided. Joan, a 25-year-old mother of two who lost custody of her children, has also damaged her health by wandering the streets for extended periods during harsh winter months while in a drug stupor.

Patty, a 42-year-old grandmother, and her husband of 25 years have lost everything they own and now live in a motel where they pay for a room by the week.

Kathy, 28, fears a similar fate. A mother of three, she has been married nine years to the man who first sold her drugs in high school 13 years ago.

Paula, an attractive 28-year-old insurance sales agent, recently lost a good job earning \$36,000 a year. She has been in two major auto accidents and is currently recovering from injuries received in a hit and run accident.

Shelly, 24, now attending Oakland County Community College, has used drugs half her life.

"MEN ARE OFTENTIMES forced into treatment. That's the opposite is true of women," Schwartz said, because society tends to "sweep the issue of female addiction under the carpet."

In addition, Schwartz added, women are primary care-givers and "looked at to do everything. Some never learn to take care of themselves. They don't know what makes them happy."

These women, however, seem acutely aware of what makes them unhappy.

CHOICE counselor Tammy Dines sums it up in one word: "Shame. The core issue here is shame."

"I've always been daddy's little girl," Kathy said. "I've found it very difficult living up to his standards. He's very religious. I'm just not liv-

ing up." Since entering the program eight weeks ago, she has used drugs on three different occasions.

Still, her parents and husband, who smokes marijuana, continue to support Kathy's efforts at recovery. Joan's parents and husband, from whom she is separated, are also supportive, even after 10 years of continuing substance abuse. She lives with her parents and works part time in a delicatessen.

"I'm the baby of the family," said Joan, "the only user, the only one who hasn't achieved. I couldn't live up to any of the standards I was raised with." Now clean for 63 days, this is Joan's sixth effort at recovery, including four hospital stays.

"It's easy, to get in touch with the (bad) feelings," said Paula, whose mother is an alcoholic. "It's the good feelings that are hard to find." Paula, in recovery three times previously, has been clean nine days.

OF 47 WOMEN processed for admission into CHOICE since last spring, only 14 have completed the 12-week program or are still in treatment. Sixteen never returned after initial acceptance. Half of the remainder were asked to leave because of continued drug abuse. Urine samples are taken during the session.

Twenty women have been referred to the program by court order, 10 for criminal charges and another 10 by child protective services.

Pam, a young mother of two, is under house arrest for writing bad checks and wears an ankle tether. She is released for CHOICE participation, including counseling, aerobic exercise and evening meetings of alcoholics and narcotics anonymous or church. Three evening meetings are required weekly. When gone from home, her children attend nursery school paid for by CHOICE.



Women & COCAINE

Economists: Increase taxes, cut spending

By Dave Varga
staff writer

As Congress spent the weekend trying to bang out a compromise between House/Democratic and Senate/Republican plans for cutting the federal deficit, local economists say the best medicine for our nation would be a bit of both plans.

"While it's a little unfair to categorize broadly, Republicans want spending cuts, Democrats want higher taxes. They're both right," said

Barbara Murray, chairwoman at the University of Michigan department of finance, business and economics.

"Tax increases are necessary, but we're never going to balance our budget unless we get a handle on spending. Unfortunately, I don't see any proposal out there on spending."

Ronald Tracy of the Oakland University economics department agrees that compromise will be the best solution. "I think there's a lot to be said for doing a little bit of both."

BOTH THE HOUSE and Senate



plans include tax hikes for the nation's wealthiest taxpayers, but those hikes differ by degrees. One element, a 10 percent surtax on people who earn more than \$1 million, is ex-

pected to be part of a final package. "That tax is more a show than anything else," Tracy said.

The House plan, which hits the wealthy hardest, also includes more taxes on alcohol, cigarettes and certain luxury items, but limits Medicare cutbacks and doesn't include a gasoline tax. The Senate plan doubles the current gas tax, hits harder on Medicare recipients but goes easier on those who earn more than \$200,000 a year. Representatives in local Congress-

sional offices expected a budget compromise will take until Wednesday when the most recent budget extension, signed by President George Bush Friday, expires.

Both current plans, if enacted now, would have a negative impact on the economy, Tracy said. "Both plans are probably going to speed us up in going into a recession, the House plan perhaps a little faster," he said.

TAX INCREASES on the wealthy

won't really harm the economy. "Above \$75,000 these people have more discretionary income. It's not going to affect it," Tracy said.

"It's politically inopportune to raise taxes on the less wealthy," Murray said, "and the middle income is paying enough. As far as raising the level for higher income Americans, you have to remember, not that long ago that rate for these people was 70 percent."

Staff writer Wayne Peal contributed to this story.

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