

Starkness may limit effect of new film on alcoholism

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

"Clean and Sober" is touted as a realistic film about drug and alcohol abuse.

It's accurate enough, some say, to be helpful to recovering addicts and those who simply want more reliable information on chemical dependency.

It's topic is serious enough that the movie may signal a new era of social conscience in Hollywood, according to some film historians.

But "Clean and Sober" provokes different reactions from two of the area's experienced drug and alcohol rehabilitation experts who generally like and applaud the film, but see different strengths and weaknesses.

"It's realistic," says a staff psychiatrist for Henry Ford Hospital's chemical dependency centers. "Possibly too realistic for its own commercial good."

The movie may touch so many raw nerves that people stay away because they don't want to face their own problems, says Bobbe J. Kelley, D.O., who either treats or supervises the treatment of hundreds of addicts at centers in West Bloomfield, Troy and Dearborn.

Consciously or otherwise, people may reject the film — choosing to see others — because it reminds them of problems they don't want to face, she said.

But "Clean and Sober" has some aspects that are decidedly unrealistic — and potentially dangerous — says a clinical psychologist who has also dealt extensively with substance abuse.

"THE MOVIE PORTRAYS a treatment center as a place to hide out" and possibly find new love interests, said Sheri L. Olson, Ph.D., program manager at Ford's Maple Grove Youth Treatment Center in West Bloomfield.

"Any legitimate treatment center makes clients face their legal problems before rehabilitation. And no legitimate center would promote any activities that could lead to sexual involvements in the movie have the potential for triggering relapses among recovering addicts by rekindling "old yearnings for drugs or alcohol," she said.

"Clean and Sober" stars Michael Keaton as a yuppie commercial real estate sales person hooked on cocaine and alcohol. As if embezzling \$52,000 from his employer isn't enough trouble for our hero, his overnight acquaintance has lapsed into a fatal coma after an overdose.

The film unfolds as Keaton checks into a treatment and rehabilitation center — not because he's ready to face his addictions, but because he hopes to hide out from the cops, his boss and, possibly, life as he has shaped it.

Critics say the story and acting are so good — so convincing — that "Clean and Sober" will likely get several Academy Award nominations. Equally important, they say, the film could be used as a training film for recovering addicts.

ON THE PLUS side, both Kelley and Olson thought the public exposure to the consequences of alcohol abuse was important.

"It's not preachy or sappy," said Kelley. "It shows what can happen when recovering addicts get emotionally involved too soon. It shows the pitfalls as people start to miss (AA) meetings and lapse back into abuse."

The psychiatrist thought one part was especially realistic and meaningful. That's the sequence in which one of the film's stars — who is convincing as both a recovering addict and a sex object — snorts something, presumably cocaine, and almost immediately meets a violent death.

"That's good because (it) shows an immediate (and causal) consequence to drug use," says Kelley. That scene reinforces the idea that the results of drug abuse are direct and often fatal. "That shows death as a possible result when somebody chooses to use cocaine," she said.

Olson says the film should have more cause-and-effect scenes. "In too many scenes the actors use drugs or alcohol without bad effects," she said.

Keaton, himself, she notes for example, doesn't really have any dire effects from his drug and alcohol abuse, although he loses his job because of the abuse.

EVEN SO, "The movie is a good initial attempt to induce a concern about drug (and alcohol) abuse in the movie public," said Olson. "But scenes of people using coke could trigger yearnings in reforming addicts. People (recovering addicts) have told me they break out in a cold sweat when they see some of those scenes."

"The movie could be used in treatment centers. But I would not recommend recovering addicts see it without some way to immediately discuss some of those scenes" in which actors use drugs without suffering serious consequences.

Skill neglect over summer for students is harmful

Taking a "vacation from learning" can adversely affect a student's grades in the fall, said Dr. Raymond Huntington, head of the Farmington Hills-based Huntington Learning Center.

Basic skills like reading can slip backward when left neglected for the summer months, he said.

Even when school is out, parents can help their children "keep in shape" by encouraging a period of

reading each day, perhaps concentrating on books dealing with the child's favorite summer activity, Huntington said.

Daily chores around the house, such as helping a parent with cooking or care of an infant brother or sister, can also keep basic skills in use if the child reads recipes, reads a story to the younger child, or writes shopping lists or vacation schedules.

Hills resident 1 of 95 chosen for Harvard education event

Farmington Hills resident Dr. Fern Espino, dean of student development, GMI Engineering and Management Institute, has been selected as one of 95 participants from around the world to attend Harvard University's summer 1988 Institute for Educational Management.

The Institute for Educational Management, now in its 19th year, is a comprehensive, intensive four-week program for senior executives of colleges and universities. It provides an opportunity for growth, renewal and the development of new insights into leadership and management in higher education.

Participants in the institute are college and university presidents, vice presidents, deans and other senior officers from institutions in both the public and private sectors. All aspects of the institute's programs are designed to assist participants to benefit from the experience of their colleagues at other institutions.

Instructors for the institute include professors from the Harvard Business School, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and other leading higher education experts from around the country. The curriculum focuses on the major challenges faced by senior officers: monitoring the environment, setting directions, managing implementation, and developing resources.

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