

Pharmaceutical drug overdoses steady as pill mill crackdowns continue

Most common overdose victim statistics changing

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - Police officers, prosecutors and lawmakers call pharmaceutical drug abuse an epidemic.

From pill mill busts to deadly overdoses, the problem is widespread in Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast.

The face of who is abusing those drugs is changing.

One Treasure Coast family is still recovering from an August pharmaceutical overdose.

Local surfer Donnie Macrae of Hobe Sound died from an overdose that included the prescription drugs Oxycodone and Xanax.

Those are the two most common drugs found in pharmaceutical drug overdose deaths according to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Drug Suppression Project.

Macrae's sister, Heather Anderson of Hobe Sound said before his pharmaceutical drug overdose, Macrae was a fun loving guy.

"He was always the good time Charlie, he would always have a good time, always make everybody laugh," said Anderson.

Anderson said she saw her brother become addicted to pharmaceutical drugs and knew he was getting them with ease.

Anderson said Macrae bounced from doctors offices to pain clinic with ease, sometimes getting prescriptions for 100 to 300 pills a month

"They just are so easy to come by," said Anderson.

It's a problem Palm Beach County sheriff's detective Gary Martin is all too familiar with.

Macrae's death is one of 365 prescription drug related drug deaths in Palm Beach County in 2010 according to Martin.

That's nearly one overdose death a day.

Martin is also seeing a new trend.

"There's this consistent misperception that the public has about who's likely to overdose," said Martin.

The average pharmaceutical drug overdose victim is a 40 year old white male, employed, with at least high school diploma.

"Have a lot going for them but they just kind of slip into this hazardous behavior and they just don't know how to get out of it," said Martin.

The statistics aren't surprising to Anderson.

"These prescription pills are turning those professionals and people with so much to go for, to live for, into these zombie shell, drug abusing, I'll do anything to get my next fix," said Anderson.

Law enforcement and prosecutors are catching up with the prescription drug abuse problem.

A statewide prescription drug monitoring database and a new law designed to crack down on pill mills have helped.

Both Martin and Anderson say it's not enough.

"It's going to be an education, where people recognize that when they make the decision to take these powerful drugs it is a significant decision that they really need to stop and think about whether or not that's the step they want to take," said Martin.

Martin heads the Overdose Supression Project at the Palm Beach County sheriff's office.

Anderson said she plans on holding a pharmaceutical drug abuse awareness fundraiser in the near future.

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