

Prescription Drug Abuse On The Rise In St. Joseph **News**

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(NewsPressNow.com) - The illegal use and distribution of prescription narcotic drugs is on the rise in St. Joseph, according to the Buchanan County Drug Strike Force.



“The addiction levels for narcotic prescription pills are in some cases worse than meth,” said Terry White, an investigator with the Drug Strike Force. “It’s a million-dollar industry, illegally, here in this town alone.”

Mr. White said prescription narcotics cases have increased dramatically in the past 12 months. Since October 2012, the Drug Strike Force has handled 137 cases involving prescription drugs. Mr. White said prescription narcotic cases have been on an upward trend in St. Joseph since 2007.

Benny Gray, 42, said he started taking prescription drugs in 1998 after he was injured in an on-the-job accident at a construction site in Chillicothe. He said doctors started him on Lortab, which worked for a little while, then Percocet, and then he went to Dilaudid, which is known as “liquid heroin” on the streets.

“I started taking them by mouth at first and then one morning I couldn’t get out of bed,” he said.

That’s when he started injecting pills into his body. But when his doctors took him off the medication, Mr. Gray said he had to find other ways to get it.

He said he turned to buying prescription drugs from senior citizens.

“Old people, you know they love money, too,” Mr. Gray said. “What a lot of people don’t realize is that a lot of them elderly people, they don’t like them hard pain pills because it makes them sick to their stomach, but yes, that’s how I got started into my dealings.”

In 2012, Mr. Gray was arrested for possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. The Drug Strike Force estimates in a four-year span of dealing prescription drugs in St. Joseph, Mr. Gray had around 1,500 to 2,000 customers and made approximately \$1 million. Mr. Gray said most of that money fueled his own addiction and getting arrested saved his life.

Because these drugs come with a prescription, Mr. White said, it’s harder to close a case.

“If you stop somebody with meth, well that’s easy. That’s illegal. You can’t have it,” Mr. White said. “You stop somebody with a narcotic prescription or a pill or two, it isn’t necessarily illegal. You’ve got to show that it’s not their script.”

To top it all off, Missouri is the only state without a prescription drug monitoring program.

“That means that people from our surrounding states, people as far as Florida, are coming up to pill farm,” said Jackie Spainhower, executive director with the St. Joseph Safety and Health Council. “Go from doctor to doctor, getting legal prescriptions, getting as many pills as they can

from pharmacies and then taking them back to their states to sell for profit.â€œ

Missouri Sen. Dr. Robert Schaaf, R-St. Joseph, said he will not support the approval of a drug monitoring program unless it goes to the ballot.

â€œIf the people want to give up their right to privacy to have all of their controlled substances on a government database accessible by 20,000 people across the state, they ought to vote on it,â€œ he said.