



Charleston County News Release

Release Number: 3072

Date: December 31, 2009

Charleston County Advises to Make New Years Resolutions You Can Keep

Why "Just Say No" does not work

There is a myth that alcoholism and drug addiction treatment centers are extremely busy during the holidays because there are numerous parties and people tend to overindulge. But, according to [Charleston County's Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Services](#) staff, this does not equate to an increase in admissions for most addiction treatment centers.

"There are probably more hospital emergency room visits from accidents related to drinking or using drugs," said Dr. Jack Emmel, Medical Director of Charleston County's Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Services, which is also known as the Charleston Center. "But, the busy time for us actually starts in February."

Dr. Emmel has a theory about why this is true. He has learned that people usually make New Year's resolutions to improve their lives, with the most common resolutions being to lose weight, stop drinking or stop using drugs.

"After a month or so, people's failure to maintain their resolution hits them in the face and some of them seek help. There's a reason for this," Dr. Emmel said.

Addiction, particularly addiction to alcohol and drugs, was defined as a medical illness by the American Medical Association in 1965. In the nearly 45 years following this, research has produced a wide body of evidence about its causes, symptoms, diagnoses and treatment. It is now further understood as a chronic illness like diabetes, but it has brain effects rather than blood sugar effects.

"Among the symptoms is the obsession to drink or use," Dr. Emmel said. "This is important to remember. Obsession means that the person is repeatedly thinking about getting high."

"Just Say No?"

Some people think they just need more willpower. This myth is often encouraged by friends and family members. An alcoholic says phrases such as, "I can always stop if it gets that bad." On New Year's Eve, resolutions are numerous.

"Resolving *not* to do something is destined to fail when obsession is part of the problem," Dr. Emmel said.

"Constantly thinking about *not* drinking still keeps the mind focused on the alcohol. Although the person is trying to refrain, it is still a reminder, or a trigger. Almost everyone loses this mind game."

Making positive resolutions instead

Mark Cowell, Director of Charleston Center, compares the "Just Say No" approach with fighting a heavyweight boxing champion. "Every time you get in the boxing ring to use willpower against drinking, you get knocked down. The key is to stop getting in the ring at all. Stop fighting," he says.

It sounds strange when I tell people they can win if they stop fighting, but experience has shown that directing willpower to something positive works."

According to Cowell, a New Year's resolution that has a much better chance of success is to resolve to get help.

“There are many great resources in Charleston County,” Cowell said. “Charleston Center has inpatient and outpatient programs. We have a 24-hour helpline, (843) 722-0100. There are many other resources such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Many churches also offer self-help groups such as Celebrate Recovery.”

According to Cowell, just saying no to addiction is like trying to just say no to a heart attack. “Take a positive action instead,” he says. “The rewards can be incredible, and 2010 can be the best year you ever had.”

For more information, contact Charleston County’s Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services at (843) 958-3300 or visit <http://www.charlestoncounty.org/Departments/DAODAS/index.htm>.

SIDEBAR

September 2009 marked the 20th year that the [U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment](#) declared September as [National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month](#). The goal was to educate the public on the nature of addiction as a chronic disease and to promote the fact that intervention, treatment and recovery can improve the lives of families who have loved ones suffering from the diseases.

[Charleston County Government](#) joined with 98 other states, counties and cities in issuing proclamations supporting National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month. [Charleston County Council](#) recognized the effort with a resolution during its Sept. 15, 2009, regular council meeting, and honored staff from Charleston County’s [Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services](#).