

Drug treatment program specializes in teen help

By STEVE HOOKS
Of the Emerald

A stay at Eugene's Adolescent CareUnit ought to be a sobering experience — at least, the staff of this new drug abuse treatment center hopes it will be.

The center, which is designed to "deal with the special problems of the teenage alcoholic and substance abuser," opened its doors at Broadway and Madison streets last week. The program is the first of its kind in the state.

The CareUnit is at the former site of Valley Lane Hospital, and is under the direction of Sacred Heart Hospital. Its staff includes a medical doctor, a psychologist and a team of nurses and therapy specialists. It ultimately will provide 20 beds.

The program came none too soon, says director Joel Koch. The Northwest has been in dire need of this type of program because teen-age drug abuse is on the rise, he says.

In the past, adolescents had to travel out-of-state for this type of treatment, Koch says, adding there are fewer than 10 adolescent care units in the country.

"More young people are drinking than used to" nationwide, Koch says. However, he says he has no figures on whether Oregon's teen-agers are drinking more.

Alcohol, which was the "in" drug among teenagers 20 years ago, gave way to "hard" drugs in the early 1970s, but recently has regained its popularity.

Many people identify teens with "hard" drug abuse and are shocked to learn of the teen alcohol problem, Koch says.

The problem strikes an emotional vein in adults because they realize alcoholism is not limited to adults, he says. An unhappy home environment, alcoholic parents, and school pressures all may contribute to teen alcohol abuse, Koch adds.

At the center, teens are examined and counseled to determine whether they are chemically dependent on a drug, Koch says. Patients then enter a carefully supervised "drying out" period. Extreme cases of dependence require "drying out" at Sacred Heart Hospital, he says.

"Alcoholism physically progresses much more rapidly in adolescents than adults.

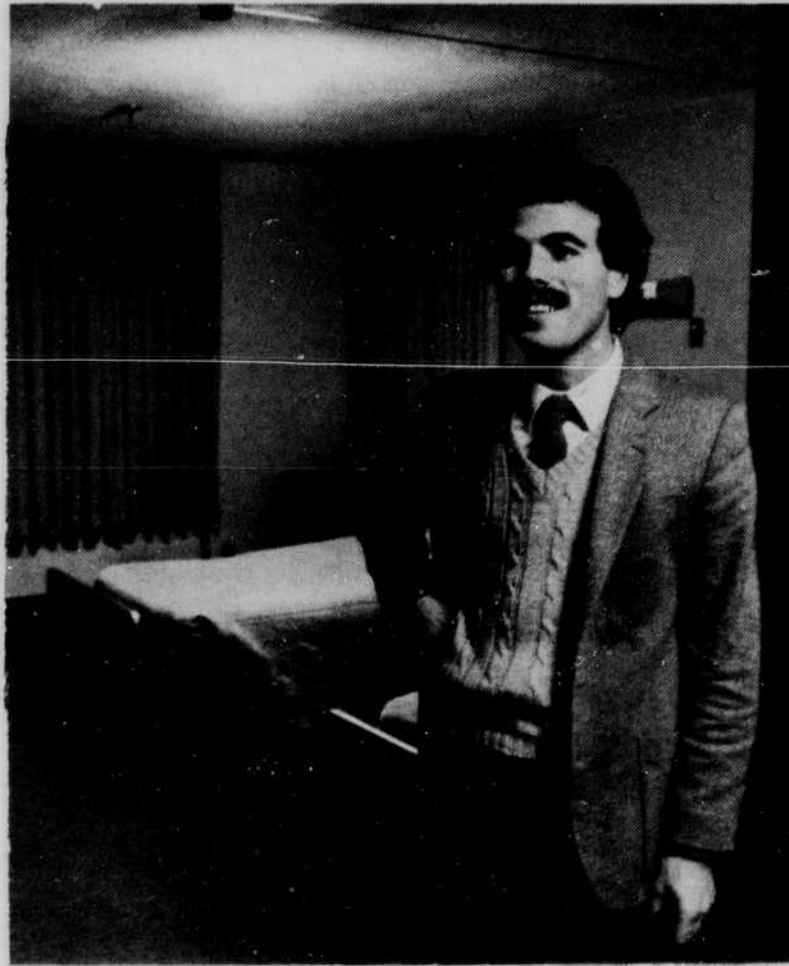


Photo by Mark Pynes

The Eugene Adolescent Care Unit, which opened last week, is the first in-state treatment center for alcoholic teenagers, says the Center's director.

Because of this, medical evaluation and monitoring is extremely important," says Peter Patricelli, the CareUnit's medical director.

The program stresses a drug-free environment that is so rigid only decaffeinated coffee is served, says Dan Siemens, nurse manager of the unit.

But the program involves more than "drying out."

Following detoxification, the patient enters a "highly structured and intensive" recovery program emphasizing family involvement, Koch says.

"The more involvement the family has in therapy, the greater the chances of successful treatment," Siemens says.

"Family involvement assures the re-establishment of communication lines and the development of mutual understanding and respect," Koch says.

The program includes alcohol and drug education; individual, group and family counseling, and therapy that stresses the "development of alternative peer group relationships and social skills," Koch says.

"The goals are to help each young person establish a more positive self-image, develop a more effective value system and make more responsible

and appropriate decisions," he says.

The program works on a reward and consequence system, Siemens says.

Teens who successfully complete a program level — usually within a week — are given new privileges, such as movie-going.

With each additional level completed, more privileges are meted out, Siemens says. Likewise, a violation of the rules results in privileges being taken away, he adds.

The program enables the teen to continue schoolwork and to make decisions about treatment, Koch says.

Patients and families also participate in programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Al-Anon. After successful completion of the four to six-week program, the patients and families attend weekly "aftercare sessions" for about three months, Koch says.

Koch says that because the program just started, a "typical patient" profile or successful cure rate hasn't been determined yet.

He adds that because alcoholism and drug abuse are considered "progressive, fatal" diseases, the goal of the cured teen is to remain completely "dry."

program is both necessary and has a tremendous chance for succeeding," he says.

Elbie says he already has noticed more awareness of the burglary problem among dorm residents.

Tentative plans for the watch center around a student chosen in each dorm to educate dorm residents about crime prevention. Those students also would give advice and information on personal safety and crime

trends, Allison says.

He says he thinks the dorm watch could help decrease dorm burglaries.

"We firmly believe that a student has a right to get a college education and not get victimized," he says.

Unfortunately, the statistics show that students who attend a four-year higher education institution probably will be victimized at least once, Allison says.

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Roy Elbie, a Sheldon dorm resident who chairs the governance committee, says he feels strongly that the program is necessary.

He says the burglary problem seems to be worse this year than either of the other two years he's lived in the dorms.

"It's our hope that we can initiate this program from the grass roots — the students themselves," Elbie says.

"I feel very strongly that the Oregon Daily Emerald



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