

Editorial

Testing won't cure nation's drug abuse

Drug abuse has captured the nation's attention. Particularly since the death of basketball star Len Bias, the media have been filled with statistics regarding every aspect of drug abuse. And with every report, the public turns with increasing enthusiasm to one answer: drug testing.

But people are confusing the indicator with the solution. Testing may indicate drug abuse, but it does little to correct the problem.

Drug testing is invading nearly every aspect of American life. More and more firms are testing applicants and employees for drugs. The National Football League announced its intention to test players for drugs, adding football players to the growing list of athletes tested for drugs.

Education Secretary William Bennett recently encouraged college presidents to consider testing incoming students for drugs. The University is considering a stricter testing program for athletes.

Testing-mania even has entered the home. With a recently unveiled kit called "Aware," parents can send a child's urine sample to a company laboratory to discover if the child is using drugs.

Why is drug testing so popular? Maybe because it is quick, easy and inexpensive compared to education and treatment programs. It gives unemotional yes or no answers, even if a percentage of those answers are wrong. Testing brings the appearance of rational science and cool numbers to a world of confusion. It brings a false sense of control to an out-of-control situation.

But in the rush to test everyone, the problem itself is being forgotten—maybe because treating the problem is much more difficult than collecting a urine sample. While the clamor for testing swells, attention to rehabilitation and education seems to have fallen by the wayside.

It's not that testing doesn't have a place. For pilots, police and others whose drug abuse could endanger lives besides their own, testing is appropriate. But when testing becomes more important than education and treatment, it is dangerous. Tests are not enough deterrent to prevent people from trying drugs. Neither will the threat of a test give addicts enough strength to kick their habits.

If Bennett wants to save America's young people from drug abuse, he should have pressed college presidents to review and upgrade drug education in their schools.

The University, instead of beefing up its drug testing program, could better spend its time and money re-evaluating the closure of the Drug Information Center. It should study the effectiveness of the drug segment included in the health course required for all students.

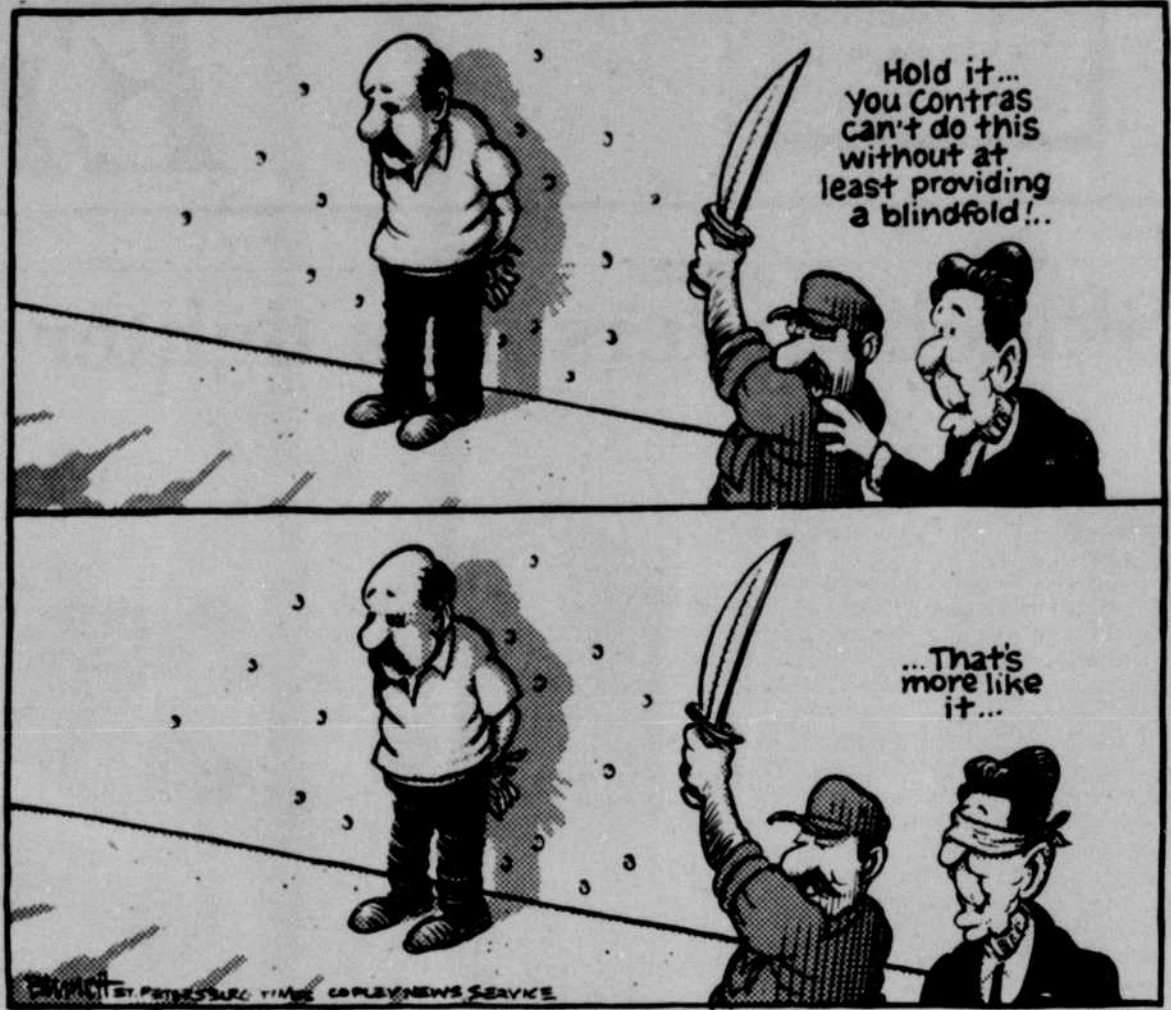
Rather than rely on an impersonal test, parents should learn how to speak to their children about drugs. They should learn how to recognize the signs of drug abuse. If their child is abusing drugs, they should learn where to turn to treat their child's addiction. A test won't replace vital communication and trust, and won't treat any child's addiction.

Employers, rather than testing employees and dismissing those that test positive, should set up in-house rehabilitation or referral programs.

There are bright spots. Some companies do provide in-house services. The NFL's testing program includes treatment for athletes.

And the University Student Health Center has hired an individual to work in the Health Education Center specifically to answer questions about drug and alcohol abuse. Also, although the Health Center does not provide treatment for drug abusers, it does refer them to outside rehabilitation programs.

But until these programs become as widespread as testing, drug abuse will continue unabated.



Letters

Be responsive

Let me get philosophical: There is a basic principle at work in the universe. We can call it "balance." We find this principle elucidated in every science, technology and system of thought we have developed.

Newton stated it succinctly: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Einstein, a bit more mystically: "God does not play dice with the universe."

As a physician, the workings and applications of the balance principle — called "homeostasis" by physiologists — are revealed to me daily. I can't imagine how I could facilitate the wonderful and mysterious process of healing without an appreciation of the balance principle.

Every time something shifts, or is intentionally shifted, something else has to shift also in response. Balance is maintained, or else the system (organ, organism, ecosphere) breaks down.

Even as I celebrate in large and small ways this tendency for universal equilibrium, one thought causes me a certain amount of agony. There are many human beings who can't or won't acknowledge the balance principle. For one reason or another, they pretend

it doesn't exist, is of no consequence to them and their actions.

A preponderance of those in power, who are in apparent control of all our destinies, display this defect in thinking. If the rest of us do not shift in response to this situation, the earth will shift beneath us, the sky above. Let us be responsive and response-able.

Vip B. Short
Eugene

Clarification

Thank you so much for your coverage of the Villard Hall Time Capsule Essay Contest. We hope to hear from some University students.

However, I would like to clear up a misunderstanding. In your article you indicated the contest originated out of disappointment over the prophecy and capsule contents from 1886. To the contrary, the contents of the box were exciting and a wonderful sampling of what people of that period thought we in 1986 would be interested in.

We hope to have many thought provoking and insightful prophetic messages of what life will be like in 2086 as entries for this contest. Thank you for an opportunity to clear up any confusion.

Cathleen Field Fenstermacher
Committee Member

Scapegoats

The ODE editorial of July 22 states that Reagan's military drug raid into Bolivia "strikes drug abuse at the source." False. The source of American drug abuse is not Bolivian cocaine growers but American drug users. Drugs come to America not because Bolivians produce them, but solely because Americans buy them.

Of course this kind of scapegoating is typical of the reactionary hysteria of the Reagan years. It seems that someone else is always responsible for America's problems. What Lee Iaccoca calls "the rapid de-industrialization of the American economy" is blamed on the Japanese. Mass unemployment is blamed on Mexicans called "illegal aliens," as opposed to those of us who have come here from Mars legally. Fifteen million malnourished (yes, 15 million) and 35 million poor are blamed on America's liberal-inspired "loss of moral fiber."

AIDS is blamed on homosexuals, though of course we straight people are never blamed for all the wonderful sexual diseases we've created. A slave rebellion breaks out in our Central American colonies, and this is blamed on the Russians. Ditto for our insane and unprovoked arms buildup.

In the past five years, 12 million workers have lost their jobs due to plant closures, and this is blamed on the labor unions, who have the gall to demand a decent wage for their workers. Whatever the problem, someone else is always to blame.

What we Americans never want to accept is that we, not others, are the cause of our problems.

Glen Sacks
English

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Letters to the editor must be limited to 250 words, typed, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is turned in. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style. Letters to the editor should be turned into the Emerald office, Suite 300, EMU.