

Spokane Conference

By: Walt Klamath, Outpatient Counselor

Well by darn, went to Spokane, Washington on a DUI training. Had intentions of driving, but with the Pow-Wow coming on decided to fly. As most know by now, flying is not really my first choice of travel, but am getting a little used to the idea. Anyway called the travel service, they first reserved a tiny plane, I said, "I want a big plane", so, they say, "OK... United". Sounds good to me. Got to the airport and had to take a shuttle to the plane, that's OK too, had to do that in Denver once. Could not see any big planes though, tiny little cracker boxes, then the horrible truth...United Express, an 18 passenger.

Now, again, all of these doubts began to surface. When the plane started the takeoff there seemed plenty of power, forced back against the seat pretty firmly.

I was sitting right behind the cockpit and could see all the instruments and gauges and what have you, not that they meant anything to me. As we were flying, could look down on Mt. St. Helens, Rainier, and Hood and could see one of the forest fires in progress.

Then maybe it was the altitude doing something with the ears, but one of the motors sounded funny. Another passenger looked a little worried also, which really didn't help matters much. The pilot reached over and flipped a switch or two, wiggled some other doggy, and did all types of contortions, however did not look too worried. Then the character reached into something like a glove box and brought out a manual of some sort. Of course the first thought in my pea-brain was it was an instruction manual on how to fix whatever was wrong. As I was watching the gauges, waiting for something different to happen, the passenger behind me asked if I was a pilot because I was watching the instruments. I did know what the altimeter was and the compass, I assume, which is the wrong thing to do, but I did it anyway, was a thing that probably was the radar with all kinds of images showing on it, it was interesting though.

It was a rough ride in places, up and down, not all around though. The plane did not vibrate like the big ones do, but ones heart comes right up in the throat then goes the other way just as fast. The altimeter says that the plane would drop about a 100 feet then raise back to where it was supposed to be. The pilot must have had it on automatic cause they didn't do anything, just sat there.

It was an interesting conference. Most of the people there were from reservations where they have their own judicial system. Some of the topics discussed were what works in Indian Country, about driving under the influence. Seems that several of the tribes are using sobriety check points. This seems to have an impact on the driving deaths due to alcohol. Then, too, the tribes that use the check point system along with a victims impact panel has a great impact on the drivers. These the drivers have to talk to the people that have been injured or people who have lost someone in an alcohol related incident.

Some of the Tribes are going for having a low blood alcohol content on the reservation like .02 and some of the others are looking at .04. This also is in the Oregon works, too,

maybe in the next legislature session. There was a person from the Dept. of Transportation. He was stressing the point that interstate truck drivers should have basically what airline pilots have, at least 24 hours since the last drink before driving.

One of the very interesting segments was the advertising agency. One of the presenters was against the way advertising targets the young people and the minority peoples. Now the counterpart from the advertising world implied that the young people were not supposed to read the posters. These bill boards and signs are all in plain view. It was asked why all the pictures were of young people, lovely half-naked women and muscular young men always having a good time and attracting the opposite sex as a result of the product, alcohol. It was asked why do they not show alcohol as the killer that it is, the destruction of families and communities. This was not addressed, next question. It did get very controversial and a little heated.

Seat belts and infant car seats were discussed at length. There are many more people being stopped now for not being properly belted in a vehicle. The way I wear one is not proper I found out, not the hard way, yet. Anyway, according to statistics, seat belts do save lives. Of course, as was pointed out, some cases nothing could save the life. Much of these topics are covered in our first responder trainings with the Fire Dept. But I had not associated them with our own program. The infant car seats were talked about at great length. An interesting point was that car seats or restraints are not so new, our people used them many many years ago, the cradle board.

When talking of the adolescents, I cannot remember which tribe it is, that when a youth is picked up for whatever cause (maybe curfew violation or minor in possession), someone has to take charge of the person. This one Tribe has it set up that when a youth is detained, a parent has to come in. However it is not the parent of that youth, it is the parent from the previous youth that was detained. The reasoning is kind of logical. The parent is going to be irritated, but will not be quite so angry with another person's child.

This was a good conference. There were many good ideas thrown around. This particular conference was the first one that I have attended where the majority of the attendees were not in recovery. There were not many counselors present. There were many tribal judges, tribal police, tribal attorneys, environmentalists and you name it, they were there. It did make it interesting.

Am I An Alcoholic?

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This little phrase is quite often heard. The answer, "are you?" Alcoholism is the only disease that the patient has to make the diagnosis, a self diagnosis, and these are difficult to do. There are many symptoms to diagnose alcohol abuse, and these are the same as the alcoholic symptoms. The difference is in the unseen to others.

Alcohol abuse: the patient uses regularly, sometimes daily. Most of the time the patient will not miss too much work, will

get driving offenses, domestic and family problems. However, if there is an important job program or attraction that requires them to be completely sober, they will be.

An alcoholic will miss work sometimes, sometimes be late for work, maybe leave early now and then, have repeated driving offenses, will have family and domestic problems. If this person has an important engagement that requires them to be completely sober, the chances are that the patient will completely forget it.

The alcoholic, is addicted to alcohol. It is the most important thing in life, it is life. Once an alcoholic takes a drink, the phenomenon of craving sets in. This is termed an obsession of the mind. An obsession of the mind is a thought that overrides all other thoughts.

We, the alcoholic, are the only ones that know if the craving is present when we take that first drink of the day week or whenever. Any one can tell if we are alcohol abusers. Ask the child of an alcohol using family member. They will flat out say that the member is an "alcoholic". The chances are the child is correct. It is most difficult to fool children, though sometimes we think that we are doing a good job of it.

Alcoholism is the loss of control over alcohol and other sedative hypnotic drugs, prescribed or otherwise. There are four phrases according to the Jellinek chart, which is accepted by all alcohol and drug programs:

-The first phase, **pre-alcoholic**:

Everyone is in this phase. These occasionally get drunk, not obsessed with getting into drinking situations, though in time will seek out situations that involve alcohol. These people find that sometimes it takes the

edge off the days problems, as time goes on it will take a little more alcohol to do the same effect. What to do at this point, nothing.

-The **Warning Phase**:

At this point there is a problem starting to arise. The person is kind of aware of it but will not say so to anyone [denial]. In this stage "blackouts" start happening. A blackout is a period of amnesia. One will carry on as if normal, do all things, have a good time or whatever, and not remember any part of it. They will have more occasions to drink, will seek out drinking situations, or may start drinking in secret, may feel guilty about their drinking, will gulp drinks so it will not look like they are drinking as much. They figure it looks better to take one big drink rather than several little drinks. **What to do at this point?** Slow down, few will. It will be like telling some one to stop a fever or heart attack or slow down on your diabetes.

-The **Crucial Phase**:

This is onset of alcoholism. At this point there is very little control over the amount consumed. There is very little chance of quitting on their own. It can happen. Alcohol is cunning, baffling, and powerful. This is the point where alcohol starts playing games with the mind. This point some could quit if they want to without really too many problems. We say "I can quit if I want to" or sometimes it will be "when it starts giving me problems I'll quit" and the classic "I'll quit tomorrow". The Truth is, at this stage it is difficult to quit without help. **What to do at this point?** Stop on your own, get in contact with AA or