UNIT 1: Living with Drugs

Unit Overview

1. History of Alcohol and Drinking around the World, David J. Hanson, PhD, adapted from David J. Hanson, Preventing Alcohol Abuse: Alcohol, Culture and Control, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995

Alcohol use by humans, probably tens of thousands of years old, has both comforted and plagued almost every society. In this discussion author David Hanson describes the drug's journey through time.


This article discusses the legacies of Prohibition from diverse historical perspectives. Is failure the correct word to associate with this complex social process?

3. Tackling Top Teen Problem—Prescription Drugs, George Lauby and Kamie Wheelock, North Platte Bulletin, April 11, 2009

The illegal use of prescription drugs looms larger than problem drinking or marijuana use. This article examines the lives of a group of teens who currently use prescription drugs.

4. Parents’ Prescription Drugs Pose Risk to Teens, Elizabeth Fernandez, SFGate.com, August 15, 2008

According to health experts, teenagers are raiding the family medicine cabinet and suffering the consequences. This article describes how parents may actually contribute to their children’s prescription drug addiction.


Drugs on college campuses are common; federal stings are not. This article discusses the investigation at San Diego State and briefly examines when colleges should punish instead of educate.


Concern about kids’ health, on the roads, at school, and even online is a given. This article discusses some of today’s biggest worries relative to kids and drugs.

7. The Deadly World of Fake Drugs, Roger Bate, AEI Press, September/October 2008

During the past decade, trafficking in counterfeit drugs has become one of the world’s fastest growing criminal enterprises. Roger Bates discusses current trends and the implications of marketing phony drugs.


Drug cartels battling for control of the U.S.–Mexico border have made Tijuana their battlefield, and the violence is now going international as ruthless gangs snatch U.S. citizens from their homes in San Diego, Dallas, even Atlanta. It’s a war without borders, and—perhaps—without end.
Dependency, and Addiction

Unit Overview

This article discusses the scientific discovery about how one important brain chemical acts to promote craving for reward sensations. Important new implications for treating addiction are discussed.

10. My Father the Dope Dealer, Tony Dokoupil, Newsweek, August 1, 2009
Tony Dokoupil tells his story about what it was like growing up with a father who was one of the biggest suppliers of high-quality marijuana in the Northeast.

What is drug addiction? This article briefly explains what it is, how it affects the brain, and addresses the question of why some people become addicted and others do not.

This article explores the hypothesis that certain genetic factors increase a person’s risk for both alcohol and drug abuse.

At least half of one’s susceptibility to drug addiction can be linked to genetic factors. Public opinion, however, is mixed in respect to using genetic testing, to predict our liability for addiction.

Substance abuse disorders follow a dynamic course, which involve distinct cycles of development, maintenance, recovery, and relapse. The author describes how substance abuse affects the brain and related behavior.

UNIT 3: The Major Drugs of Use and Abuse

Unit Overview

Knowing the signs and symptoms of methamphetamine abuse can save lives. It is vital for medical professionals to know the protocol for identifying and treating patients affected by the use of this drug. This article discusses the symptoms of meth abuse and suggests strategies for prevention.

This paper highlights changes in the U.S. heroin market including those in source trends, the political environment, and its impacts on different geographical regions of the U.S.

More colleges are creating programs for students who are recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Does “social norm” strategy reduce drinking at colleges?

Drug smugglers are using submarines to smuggle drugs into the U.S. This article discusses some strategies being used to combat this.

Ginea-Bissau, one of the world’s poorest nations, has become an international smuggling hub and the epicenter in Africa for the cocaine trade. This article illustrates how the flow of drugs adapts not only to law enforcement pressure but also to the forces of global economics.
UNIT 4: Other Trends in Drug Use

Unit Overview


A recent study found that oxycodone produced different effects in adolescents than in adults. Adolescents who use opiates may be more likely to become addicts as adults. This article suggests that prescription opiates are gateway drugs to heroin.


This study’s findings suggest that students enrolled in the most selective colleges have high levels of past-year stimulant abuse. What variables are contributing to this trend?


Regulatory implications concerning labeling, advertising, and the clinical implications for children and adolescents are discussed.


Dan Johnson reports on and discusses the local “skittle” parties and the dangers of mixing drugs and alcohol.


The War on Drugs has long been cast as a battle against illegal narcotics, but the latest federal data shows that seven of the top 10 drugs being misused by high-school seniors are legal prescription or over-the-counter medications.


Among young people, prescription drugs have become the second most abused illegal drug. This publication provides some of the most recent survey data to describe this significant new drug trend.

29. Prescription Drugs Find Place in Teen Culture, Donna Leinwand, USA Today, June 13, 2006

Drug counselors across the country are beginning to hear about “pharm” parties, where random prescription pharmaceuticals are taken by the handful often in combination with alcohol. This article discusses the developing underground culture that surrounds the rising abuse of prescription drugs by teens and young adults.


Drug testing is expensive and full of loopholes. Some believe that education is a better preventative measure than testing, but experts question methods frequently used to inform athletes about the health hazards and ethical considerations of doping.
UNIT 5: Measuring the Social Costs of Drugs

Unit Overview

33. The Axis of Upheaval: Mexico: State of War, Sam Quinones, Foreign Policy, March/April 2009

Mexico’s hillbilly drug smugglers have morphed into a raging insurgency. Violence claimed more lives in Mexico last year alone than all the Americans killed in the war in Iraq. And there’s no end in sight.

34. FBI: Burgeoning Gangs behind up to 80% of U.S. Crime, Kevin Johnson, USA Today, January 29, 2009

Criminal gangs in the United States have swelled to an estimated 1 million members responsible for up to 80 percent of crimes in communities across the nation. According to officials, these gangs are the primary retail-level distributors of most illicit drugs.

35. The Role of Substance Abuse in U.S. Juvenile Justice Systems and Populations, Heather Horowitz, Hung-En Sung, and Susan E. Foster, Corrections Compendium, January/February 2006

Nearly 89 percent of juvenile arrests involve children and teens who are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. This article includes some discussion of the variables that influence this.


Arrests for drug sales or, more often, drug possession are rising and despite public debate and limited efforts to reduce them, large disparities persist in the rate at which blacks and whites are arrested and imprisoned for drug offenses.

37. How Do Club Drugs Impact HIV Prevention?, Mike Pendo and Pamela DeCarlo, A publication of the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies and the AIDS Research Institute, July 2004

This article discusses the popular use of club drugs and their relationship to partying, sex, and HIV transmission. What’s being done to mitigate this problem?

38. The Problem with Drinking, Cheryl Harris Sharman, Perspectives in Health, vol. 10, no. 1, 2005

The abuse of alcohol is an international issue. The wider problem of alcohol in the Americas is discussed in this article. Is this a good example of a world-wide epidemic of alcohol abuse?


Abuse of the sedative suspected in Michael Jackson’s death is a growing problem among medical professionals, increasing pressure on the government to restrict it as a controlled substance.

UNIT 6: Creating and Sustaining Effective Drug Control Policy

Unit Overview


Authors Jonathan Caulkins and Peter Reuter argue that the nature and extent of the illegal drug problems in the United States have changed during the past two decades, and that U.S. drug policy needs to adjust to these changes. Do you agree.

Recent studies show drug courts are one of the few initiatives that reduce recidivism—on average by 8 percent to 10 percent nationally—and save taxpayers money.


California’s prisons are packed with repeat nonviolent drug offenders. Folsom State Prison’s Parolee Substance Abuse Program seeks to rehabilitate, not incarcerate.

43. America on Drugs: Prohibition Didn’t Work Then; It Isn’t Working Now, Jacob Sullum and Charles “Cully” Stimson, Los Angeles Times, April 21, 2008

What's the difference between drug legalization and drug decriminalization? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Authors Sullum and Stimson discuss the pros and cons of each.

44. Feature: Twenty Years of Drug Courts—Results and Misgivings, Drug War Chronicle, Issue #580, April 10, 2009

The first drug court, designed to find a more effective way for the criminal justice system to deal with drug offenders, was born in Miami in 1989. Since then drug courts have expanded dramatically and include one in at least one in every state. Are they working?

45. Drugs: To Legalize or Not, Steven B. Duke, American News Essay, April 25, 2009

Supporters argue that decriminalizing the possession and use of marijuana would raise billions in taxes and eliminate much of the profits that fuel bloodshed and violence in Mexico. Do you agree?


Although cannabis has been used as a therapeutic agent throughout history, it has never been submitted to the FDA for approval. Would it pass the test?


Drug policy has always been a complicated issue for the national security apparatus of the United States. The international dimension of the issue remains difficult for diplomats because it often involves dealing with law enforcement in corrupt countries. What to do about this?

UNIT 7: Prevention, Treatment, and Education

Unit Overview


It is now estimated that the criminal justice system generates nearly 50 percent of all referrals to community-based drug-abuse treatment. With state legislatures searching for cost-effective alternatives to incarceration, the growth in drug abuse treatment for offenders can only be expected to continue.

49. Accessing Substance Abuse Prevention Programs for Schools, Jennifer L. Schroeder and Gail E. Johnson, Intervention in School and Clinic, vol. 44, no. 4, March 2009

Schools are in a unique position to help families' access resources for their children and act as a place where services can be provided to many children who are at risk for substance use. This article describes new ways to bring substance abuse prevention services into schools.

50. Whose Responsibility Is Substance Abuse Treatment?, Melvin L. Williams, Corrections Today, vol. 70, no. 6, December 2008

Treating drug abuse is difficult in the best of circumstances and there are no magic bullets. Who should do what to treat huge numbers inmates with long histories of drug abuse?


Whether its vodka, rum, marijuana, or crank, addicts often say that they thought treatment and rehab were a joke. What has to come together for rehab to work?