

I want to make the public, specifically parents and grandparents, aware of some growing trends we are seeing in our county. The newest battle we are facing is prescription drug abuse.

When deputies and/or officers are making contact with people for driving infractions, arrests, or any other incident where law enforcement has a reason to search individuals--especially young people--we are finding prescription pills.

When asked about these drugs, the individuals DO NOT have prescriptions for them. They often claim that they are holding them for a friend or family member. The truth is they are abusing these drugs. These people are being arrested for possession of these prescription drugs and many times for operating a vehicle while impaired by these drugs.

Through conversation with the young individuals we have arrested for prescription drug abuse, we have learned of a huge misconception many hold. Many people assume prescription drugs are not as dangerous as the street drugs and that the penalties for abusing them are not as high.

Prescription drug abuse is growing rapidly because of accessibility. Our youth can find these drugs in their own medicine cabinets, and if not there, in the medicine cabinet of a family member. Parents, grandparents, and other family members must be aware of the temptations that exist in their medicine cabinets and be responsible for the prescription itself. That involves taking the drug in its entirety or responsibly ridding of the excess pills.

Our youth know that more often than not, adults will not notice a missing pill or even an old bottle of pills from the cabinet.

We have also become aware of the troubling fact that drug dealers are approaching our youth and offering them money to steal a family member's prescription drugs. Drug dealers and drug seekers are often willing to pay a very large sum of money which is very tempting for young people not to pass up. Drug dealers are aware of people in the community who have recently had surgery, been ill, or take medication for sleeping, anxiety, or attention disorders. The drugs we most commonly see abused are painkillers such as Oxycodone or Hydrocodone, stimulants like Adderall or Ritalin, and depressants such as Xanax or Valium.

The numbers in Cass County reflect the growing problem we are facing. Our officer with specific drug impairment training identified 17 drug-impaired drivers in 2010. That number has consistently increased over the past five years. In 2015, that officer identified 43 drug-impaired drivers. While that number does include drivers impaired by meth and marijuana, since 2010, 204 people have been arrested for drug impaired driving. Forty-four of those drivers were impaired by prescription drugs.

This deputy's OWI statistics rank second in the state of Iowa when compared to other officers with similar training. A rural location such as Cass County should not have a deputy with drug impaired OWI statistics higher than large cities such as Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, or other college towns in the state.

I am writing this to alert parents and grandparents and to motivate you to take notice. Take inventory and monitor the prescription drugs in your homes. Store the drugs in a place where they are not easily accessed. Dispose of your expired or unused prescriptions. The Atlantic Police Department has a box located in its lobby where you can dispose of your prescriptions safely.

This is a problem in Cass County. Please do your part to minimize it.

Darby McLaren
Cass County Sheriff