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Substance Abuse: A Major Global Health Issue

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Duane C. McBride

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that some 315 million people, or almost seven percent of the world population, used an illicit drug in the last year. Injection drug use remains a major means of HIV transmission around the world.¹ WHO estimates that up to 2.5 million deaths per year are directly related to alcohol consumption, causing nearly four percent of all deaths. Alcohol consumption is one of the top three major health problems worldwide.² The costs of substance abuse include the direct cost of health-care delivery treating the consequences of use, the expenses related to criminal prosecution and incarceration, drug- and alcohol-related traffic fatalities, the wide-ranging harm to families of users, and the impact on economic development and productivity. Consequently, WHO has concluded that alcohol and substance abuse are major health issues globally in all areas of economic development, human health, and well-being.

Ellen G. White and the other founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were major participants in and supporters of early temperance efforts. The early church's message was consistent, well-articulated, and powerful. For many decades, starting with the 1860s, our stand on temperance formed part of a larger Protestant proclamation about the destructive power of alcohol and drugs. However, more recently, the voices of most other churches have grown silent; in fact, some of the traditionally strongest supporters of the temperance cause now allow members and employees to use alcohol.³ The Seventh-day Adventist Church remains one of the few denominations to maintain a firm position on abstinence. However, the Adventist Church itself also faces the reality of changing attitudes and behavior toward alcohol.⁴ As the article by Landless and Williams documents (and critiques), sci-

entific and popular media have touted the supposed health benefits of alcohol.

But in spite of media attempts to encourage more positive attitudes toward alcohol use, data, mostly from the North American Division, consistently show that Adventist young people use alcohol and drugs at a two-thirds lower rate than youth in the general population. And that rate does not appear to be increasing.⁵ Adventist schools must seek effective ways to uphold church standards and to transmit our historical position on alcohol and drug use. However, we also must develop redemptive policies to deal with students who experiment with or initiate use of

substances, and establish strategies to protect the majority of our young people from the influence of those who use dangerous substances.

This special issue of *THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION* addresses a number of issues related to substance use. Three articles focus on school policymaking: The one led by Judith Fisher explores how to create redemptive policies at the college level, while the

one with Curtis VanderWaal as primary author targets the academy level. Combined with this helpful material is an article that focuses specifically on redemptive approaches to use when dealing with students who struggle with substance-abuse problems, also with VanderWaal as lead author. This article shares a portion of the scientific research that has identified a wide variety of factors that protect our youth from engaging in substance use. Alina Baltazar is the lead author of an article that presents the latest scientific information on protective factors against high-risk behavior, such as parental bonding, strong spirituality, service, and adult mentoring—areas that can be developed or strengthened in our schools.

The article by Peter Landless and David Williams carefully examines the latest scientific evidence regarding the

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supposed health benefits as well as the negative consequences of alcohol use and abuse. Harvey Burnett's article, which focuses on a major international school-based prevention program called D.A.R.E., provides excellent practical suggestions on how to adapt its activities to Adventist schools. Finally, an article led by Gary Hopkins focuses on a more recent phenomenon, the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and offers recommendations for school policymaking.

Throughout the world today, substance abuse is a major health and human tragedy. Seventh-day Adventists play a major role in research and policy in this health area. This special issue of the JOURNAL was produced in collaboration with the two church-sponsored organizations most active in substance-abuse policy and research: the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (ICPA) and the Institute for the Prevention of Addiction (IPA). The ICPA, directed by Peter Landless, has been recognized by the United Nations, and plays an active role throughout the world promoting policies and practices to reduce substance abuse. The IPA, directed by Duane McBride, conducts primary outreach on the etiology and prevention of substance abuse as well as best-practice policies. We believe that it is important for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to continue to support and conduct primary research on preventing substance abuse and to advocate at the highest global levels for policies and practices that address this major global health issue.—Peter N. Landless and Duane C. McBride.

Peter N. Landless, M.B., B.Ch., MFGP (SA), M.Med., FCP (SA), CBNC, FACC, FASNC, is Director of Health Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, and Executive Director of the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (ICPA).

The Coordinator for this special issue, Duane C. McBride, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Behavioral Science Department at An-

draws University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Director of the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions, also at Andrews University. He has conducted and published research on a wide variety of topics including drug abuse, enhancing adolescent resilience, and public health policy. For a number of years, Dr. McBride has served in a consulting capacity to the National Institutes of Health, the University of Miami School of Medicine, the National Institute of Justice, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The editorial staff of the JOURNAL express heartfelt appreciation for his commitment to getting this special issue into print, and for the many hours he spent identifying authors, topics, and peer reviewers, evaluating manuscripts, chasing down sources and miscellaneous information, and cheerfully responding to hundreds of questions from the Editor.

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