

Addiction Exchange

News from the worlds of
clinical practice and research

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Welcome to *Addiction Exchange*, a forum for the exchange of clinical practice and research information among clinicians, scientists, educators, and administrators in the field of addiction. In this issue, we share a few Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention for Adolescents Conference attendees' comments given in post-conference telephone interviews; we also summarize the feedback from the written post-conference participant evaluations. (The theme of the September 2000 conference was chosen to correspond with CSAT's Recovery Month 2000 theme, adolescence.)

The most highly touted aspect of the conference was the keynote presentation, *Research to Practice: Adolescent Treatment Trends*, by Michael Nerney, consultant and internationally known lecturer. "The keynote speaker set the tone for the entire conference - it was exciting and really left me motivated," said attendee John Heath, substance abuse specialist for the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Ninth District Court Service Unit. "I really enjoyed [his talk] about the adolescent brain - it was current, it was relevant, and provided me with information I was able to use right away." Nerney, a dynamic speaker who continued his keynote presentation in a filled-to-capacity workshop, also received very high ratings in post-conference evaluations. His afternoon workshop was so well-attended, in fact, that some were disappointed when seating was unavailable. Heath attributed the workshop's popularity to the fact that Nerney laid the foundation in his keynote speech and got people interested in the topic. Doug Newsome, Substance Abuse Programs Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Services' Eastern Regional office, also found Nerney's presentation to be useful: "It was valuable in helping me understand how drugs affect adolescents, and the differences between treatment modalities for adults and adolescents." Nelson Calisch, substance abuse clinician and LPC with Henrico Mental Health, found Nerney's presentation engaging and helpful, particularly what was said about adolescents' emotions generally being two times as intense as adults. "It's valuable in helping us understand how attractive drugs are [to adolescents] and why," said Calisch. "And his point about marijuana masking the self-critical voice was interesting. Teens find it particularly attractive and a good anesthetic for quieting that voice, and their hyperawareness of their own competence, inabilities, shame, and all that makes it difficult for us to say, 'You shouldn't do this,' or 'It's not good for you,'" added Calisch.

Other popular workshops included *Strength-Based Practice*, taught by Michael Clark, co-founder and co-director of Michigan's Institute for Strengths in Juvenile Justice, which reviewed what 40 years of motivational studies have learned about working with youths reluctant to get help for substance abuse, and the advanced SASSI module (Substance Abuse Screening Inventory) by Scott Reiner of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice.

All interviewees gave high marks overall to the conference and the locale. "It was high style - very professional and well-done," said Calisch, who appreciated the wide range of topics available. So many interesting workshops were offered, in fact, that interviewees commented there was no way to attend all of the modules they wanted to. "It's a dilemma common at conferences," said Calisch, who wouldn't mind seeing a longer conference next time if there were enough workshops of interest to him. "If it's a four-day conference, you could look at Program A one day, Program B another day, and so on," he said. Newsome suggested that it might have been beneficial to offer specific workshops on different days and at different times.

When asked what they'd like to see added to future conferences, Newsome expressed an interest in how drugs impact adolescent development, as well as treatment specific to advanced clinicians. Calisch reported an interest in a more comprehensive workshop around adolescent treatment, covering in depth several modalities including what's working and what isn't. Heath said he'd like to see more information about the adolescent brain. "Cognitive structuring is a big piece of treating adolescents, so spending more time differentiating adolescents from adults can help foster the development of new programs designed specifically for adolescents," he said. Heath also would like to see more on engaging the family in the treatment process in future adolescent conferences.

Discuss this topic further on the Addiction Exchange Forum at: <http://www.mid-attc.org/wwwboard/wwwboard.shtml>

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