

Drugs and Sports— Developing a Drug Policy

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The problem of drugs in society is vast. One out of four students in a classroom has an immediate family member who is an alcoholic. Over ninety percent of the high school seniors have consumed alcohol. Highway deaths due to alcohol related accidents are the nation's largest cause of teenage fatalities. One out of ten people who drink will become alcoholic.

The problem of substance abuse encompasses both alcohol and other mind-altering drugs. Unfortunately, alcohol and marijuana are considered gateway drugs for other addictive drugs. Marijuana use among high school students has declined in the past years. Yet 47 percent of the graduating seniors have tried marijuana (Payne, Hahn, & Pinger, 1990).

Drug use in sports mirrors drug use in society. Often advertisements show sports events and alcohol consumption together. The mental connection of sports and alcohol is often made. Unfortunately, the excessive use of alcohol can reach a point where it is described as an illness. Even Bob Welsh, acclaimed Cy Young award winner became alcoholic while he was a youthful baseball player. Like all alcoholics, he denied he had a problem. His friends, at first, protected him. Fortunately, he has confronted his problem and is a recovering alcoholic (Welch & Velsey, 1982).

Steroid use in sports is increasing. The famed 1988 Olympic sprinter, Ben Johnson, lost millions in terms of endorsements when he tested positive for steroid use. Did Johnson serve as a role model for inspiring young athletes?

In a report to the Office of the Inspector General, Kusserow (1990) indicates five to 11 percent of the high school boys have experimented with steroids. In 1985 NCAA bowl games, steroid testing revealed at least eight major universities had athletes who tested positive for steroids (Everson, 1987). Goldman, Bush, and Klatz (1984) document the demise of five steroid users in *Death in the Locker Room*. In Kusserow's research with steroid users, 42 percent said that they had been influenced to use steroids by adult and famous role models. He believes steroid use is motivated by socially acceptable values and life stage concerns with appearance and peer approval. What is needed are good role models, clear standards, and enforceable laws.

However, there are no standards to help enforce the norms of society. When there are clear norms regarding substance abuse, and when these norms are consistent in the home, school and social environments, then there is less substance abuse among students.

■ CASE STUDIES INVOLVING DRUG POLICY

Laws reinforce the norms. Similar to laws, drug policies for schools and athletic teams may be helpful in reinforcing appropriate norms. Drug policies for athletes may be even more stringent than the regular school policies. Drug policies for athletes may be enforced for substances consumed at school, on school trips, or even when the student is not at a school related function.

In the case of *Palmer v. Merluzzi* (1988), Palmer, a high school football player, was suspended from school for ten days. He admitted he had been consuming alcohol and smoking marijuana on school property. He and some other students had left evidence of their party at the school's radio station. Following the drug incident, his father had been given written notice of his suspension from school. The letter stated that Palmer would have a formal hearing before the Board of Education. At that meeting he would hear their accusations and the evidence presented. He would then be allowed to present his version of the incident and he could have legal representation.

After the letter had been sent, school officials reviewed another Policy (138) which stated that "No student may participate in athletics who has not demonstrated good citizenship and responsibility" (p. 403). Following this other policy review, Palmer was suspended from athletics for 60 days. Palmer's father then filed a suit against school representative Merluzzi. However, Palmer did not win the case. Appellate Judge Cornwell found that "Palmer's suspension was rationally related to enforcing the legitimate goal of ensuring compliance with school policy" (p. 414).

In another case, drug policies as well as state statutes were used to bring disciplinary action against the students of Glasgow High School who drank alcoholic beverages on a school sponsored trip. In this case, *Clark County v. Jones* (1981), the judge ruled that the board of education acted arbitrarily because the students were "expelled" until the end of the semester rather being "suspended" as written in the state statute (KRS 158.150). Proper enforcement of the plain meaning of a statute or policy is an important consideration. The students should have been suspended rather than expelled.

Even if a student is consuming drugs off campus, policy may be written and enforced to cover that action. Some drugs such as marijuana are detectable in drug tests for as long as 30 days. Studies with airplane pilots showed that even one marijuana cigarette can influence motor performance 24 hours later. A thorough drug policy will consider consumption off campus as well as on campus.

In the case of *French v. Cornwell* (1979), French, a wrestler, was arrested off campus for drinking on New Year's Day. He pleaded guilty to charges of drunkenness. Because of his behavior he was suspended from the wrestling team at his school for six weeks. The courts ruled that the enforcement of the school's drug policy did not violate French's rights.

Safety of the participant and of other student should be a primary consideration. Students who have consumed drugs like alcohol and marijuana hamper motor

control while others increase aggressive behavior. Kusserow (1990) stated that athletes acknowledged an awareness of increased aggressiveness and irritability when taking steroids. Aggressiveness can be dangerous. The high school coach who replaced one of the authors of the present paper received a black eye from an aggressive student high on marijuana! As stated earlier, safety should be a major focus of the drug policy.

■ DRUG POLICY FORMULATION

In constructing a drug policy, a dialogue should be established with the people who will be affected by that policy. The purpose of the policy should be carefully written. The policy should be concise and unambiguous. It should indicate who will be affected by the policy. People should be treated equally.

Prescription and over-the-counter drugs should be considered in the policy. Some people abuse these drugs. Also, some of these drugs have synergistic effects. For example, alcohol mixed with barbiturates may be fatal.

If the drug is a prescription drug, get permission to call the doctor concerning the drug. Also decide who will keep and administer the drug during the day while the student is in school.

Drugs that are prohibited should be indicated in the policy. Drugs that will be tested should be indicated. (The NCAA lists over 34 pages of substances.) Standards of influence or impairment should be noted. For example, in most states, a .10 blood alcohol content (BAC) is considered under the influence, yet, most individuals are impaired at a .06 BAC.

These questions should be answered. If drug testing is to be used who is to conduct the test? What sampling procedures will be followed? What will be the analysis procedures? How will false positive or false negative results be handled?

Establish a secure chain of custody and put it in writing. Try to insure that samples are not mixed or mislabeled.

Confidentiality when positive results are found is important. Discussions of false positives might be considered libelous or slanderous.

The policy should also provide procedures to handle people who refuse to take the drug test. Some state constitutions are more strictly interpreted than others. For example, in the California case, *Hill v. NCAA* (1990), drug testing was considered an unlawful search.

A full discussion of drug testing is beyond the scope of this paper. Drug testing of an entire student body might not be upheld by the courts (*Odenheim v. Carlstadt-East Rutherford Regional School District*, 1985). However, random testing of athletes has been upheld in court cases (*Bally v. Northeastern*, 1989). Athletes are treated differently from regular students on this issue because participation in athletics is not mandatory.

If searches for drugs are to be used, they must be reasonable (*New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 1985). The policy should indicate who will conduct the searches and under what circumstances. Searches of school property are best conducted by school employees, not law enforcement officials. In most cases, school officials do not need search warrants.

The local police department should be contacted in all cases where drugs

are found. There needs to be a procedure for handling stolen property that is located in a search.

Due process is a variable concept depending on the facts before the court. The drug policy should consider this issue by:

1. giving written notice when the policy is alleged to have been violated
2. allowing the person adequate time to prepare for the hearing
3. providing a hearing so that the accused person may confront his accusers
4. giving the person an opportunity to be represented by counsel

Persons who will implement the policy should be trained in recognition and documentation of drug taking behavior. For example, disruptive conduct which interferes with the learning environment might be considered "reasonable cause" for a search. School personnel should know there are personal signs and symptoms of drug abuse that, if recognized early, might help in treating a student. A record should be kept which documents and dates suspected drug taking behaviors.

The policy should indicate follow-up. If a student has been a drug user, what kinds of treatment or referral will be recommended? Community agencies, guidance counselors, student assistance programs and court ordered treatment may be considered.

Confronting the problem is difficult for the student user as well as for the parents, teachers and coaches who may have been enabling the user. The policy might also cover follow-up procedures to help educate those persons who will be involved with the student. A good drug policy will give ways of monitoring follow-up activities.

As a follow-up for the user, a written commitment to improve, some form of assistance program, as well as steps to monitor progress are vital. The written commitment may help the user overcome the denial process. The steps to monitor progress may be physiological, psychological, or both. Periodic testing to show that the athlete is drug free may be required. Scheduled discussions with the athlete and treatment center personnel are appropriate.

With youngsters it is important to think of other individuals who have stayed drug free. With increased exposure to drugs, there is increased experimentation. When peers use drugs, there is often pressure to do likewise.

Knowledge of the policy is important to all individuals affected. The policy should be made known to individuals early enough for them to rid themselves of drugs. Forty- five to 90 days prior notice is suggested.

■ SUMMARY

Drug policies may relate to substances consumed at school, on school trips, or even when the student is not at a school related function. Policies are important to the institution as guidelines and norms. They should have rules and consequences clearly and concisely stated. Policies should be enforced and capable of being supported by a court of law.

A good drug policy is for the benefit of the student and society. Drugs may be prevalent in society. However, society may implement policies and laws which help to stem some of the peer pressure to use drugs and participate in sports.

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