

Dominican opens treatment center for alcohol, drug dependency

By BOB SMITH

Ten percent of the nation's population is addicted to the use of alcohol or other drugs, including cocaine.

In Santa Cruz County, the figure may be much higher; no one knows for certain. But considering the lifestyle here, and the relatively easy access to drugs like cocaine, many experts in the drug and alcohol abuse programs believe the number is much higher than the national average.

Employee involvement with drugs and alcohol has become a major corporate health issue. Some companies spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on programs to identify the chemically-dependent employee and get him or her started in a treatment program.

Alcohol and drug dependent employees characteristically have a large number of sick days each year; their work production, in many cases, is low and substandard, and they often cost the company money because of higher health insurance premiums or from problems stemming from alcoholism. Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital is joining the ranks of other Bay Area hospitals in

offering in-patient treatment programs Friday with an open house from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. marking the formal opening of its Adrian Center for the Chemically Dependent.

The center, housed in the hospital's 2NW wing, will have 22 beds and will offer people with alcohol and drug dependencies a 28-day in-patient program.

A stay in the Adrian Center could begin with a three- to five-day period of detoxifying the patient, following by a thorough physical examination to make sure that the problems are really chemically-dependent.

The day in the Adrian Center begins at 7 a.m. and ends at midnight with lights out.

In between, there are patient round tables, lectures and films, group therapy sessions, stress management and physical therapy, meetings of Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, Alanon meetings for family members, journal writing, and unit chores.

Family entertainment and social events are planned for Friday evenings, family visits and roundtable discussions on Saturday and Sunday, and passes to leave unit on Sunday afternoons.

The program involves not only the person with the chemical dependency, says Rena Saunders, the hospital's interventionist, but also the family.

Part of the regimen included in the program is a five day session with the patient's family.

Both Saunders and Jodi Hogan, manager of the hospital's Chemical Dependency Unit, stress that the most important task is to convince a person dependent on alcohol or drugs that he or she needs help.

That task is Saunders' speciality.

As an interventionist, she works with the families of people who won't admit they have a problem to get them into treatment.

Her services are available to the community-at-large, whether a patient finally checks into the Dominican facility or is referred to another type of program, such as the one operated by Janus Alcoholism Services in Santa Cruz.

"I work with people regardless of where they wind up, she said."

The Dominican program is expensive, but is not as costly as others in the general area.

How do family or friends reach someone

with an addiction problem and convince them that they need treatment?

The key ingredient, Saunders says, is "lots of love, coupled with information about the disease of chemical dependency."

The interveners need a "big stick" to get through to the addict that it's time to do something about the problem.

An employer can threaten the loss of a job. The wife or husband can threaten to end a marriage.

Older children might tell a grandparent that they can no longer care for or see a grandchild.

It takes many different types of approaches to work, says Saunders. Sometimes all it takes is a profession of love to break through.

And in some cases, nothing works. "Then you have to let them kill themselves," she said.

Once the person decides to get help, there are many programs available, including the one at Dominican.

Medical insurance will often pay for the majority of the costs associated with the program.