



Star Photo by Jessica Sullivan

DR. DONALD MACDONALD

KAOC Hears from Florida Pediatrician

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Star Living Section Editor

A Clearwater, Fla., pediatrician and expert on adolescent drug abuse, Dr. Donald Ian Macdonald, talked to young people and parents Wednesday night at the Fall Forum sponsored by Kids Are Our Concern, a local group that works against drug abuse.

Dr. Macdonald, a clinical associate professor of pediatrics at the University of South Florida Medical School in Tampa, and president of the Florida Pediatric Society, spoke not only as a doctor, but also as a parent who has dealt first hand with adolescent drug abuse.

The pediatrician arrived in Winchester Wednesday morning and spoke to professional counselors, psychologists, social workers, and consultants at 10 a.m., then had a conference with the medical staff at Winchester Memorial Hospital at 12:30, and an informal discussion with professional counselors at 2 p.m. At 4, he spoke to local school administrators, teachers, and ministers. At 7 a.m. today, Dr. Macdonald met with local pediatricians.

THE WEDNESDAY night forum at James Wood High School's Amherst Campus was attended by about 400 people, according to Jane McAllister, a steering committee member and co-founder of Kids Are Our Concern.

As he began his talk, Dr. Macdonald cited the results of a recent survey of Winchester and Frederick County students in grades 6 through 12 concerning drug and alcohol abuse. The results of that survey, made public Sept. 28, basically revealed that alcohol and marijuana use is prevalent among the students.

Dr. Macdonald touched on what happens to the lives of young people who become addicted to drugs or have an alcohol problem.

One young girl, for example, was brought to him by her parents for a checkup because she said she was always tired. The doctor checked for mononucleosis and hepatitis, but that didn't pan out. The girl was found by police a short time later passed out in the parking lot of a car. It turned out she had been drinking heavily each morning before school. Dr. Macdonald said it was the alcohol abuse that accounted for the girl's feeling of fatigue.

The doctor talked about his own son, and his period of drug addiction. "He was doing 10 or 15 drugs a day," Mr. Macdonald said. "He was drinking and smoking. He ran into problems. Now he doesn't have one."

His son underwent drug rehabilitation and is now in college, making above-average grades and free from any dependency on drugs or alcohol.

Dr. Macdonald said marijuana is a very complex structure, with 421 chemicals in 18 chemical classes. The high it creates is caused by the chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC for short. THC is a psychoactive or mind-changing drug.

Once marijuana enters the bloodstream, Dr. Macdonald says it remains urine-positive for 7 to 10 days. He said it is stored in the testicles, lungs, brains, and ovaries.

"You're dealing with dangerous stuff," he said. "It changes your behavior. You're not the same person after you smoke it."

IS THERE any way of predicting who's going to have a drug problem?

Dr. Macdonald said no one knows who's going to be another John Belushi or Mackenzie Phillips, but statistics show that it is possible to predict which

kids will have a problem with drugs, sex, and delinquency. He said many times the child that turns to drugs has a low self-image or feelings of not belonging.

The pediatrician said he dislikes the phrase "recreational drug use."

"Most teen-age parties mean getting high," he said. "Like sitting on the side of a keg party and not wanting to drink but seeing that everyone else is."

Dr. Macdonald said making these decisions becomes a part of dealing with life for teen-agers.

By the time a teen-ager reaches the third stage in marijuana dependence, Dr. Macdonald said, characteristics of his or her behavior are:

- "Cool" appearance
- No straight friends
- Family fights
- Stealing; police incidents
- Pathological lying
- School failure, expulsion
- Jobs lost

HE SAID while kids on drugs may be perceived as "rotten little kids," if you look in their eyes, you will see "pain and death."

"Inside of that person is not a rotten kid but a small person who hurts," he said.

Dr. Macdonald said out of every 100 deaths, 30 percent of them were people whose life was shortened because of alcohol, chemicals, or drugs.

"I'm not giving a moral lecture, but a health lecture," he said. "Is it drugs that make kids bad or bad kids that get into drugs? It's both," he answered.

The strongest support system Dr. Macdonald said he knew of was the family.

"We have ambivalence as a family," he said. "Do your kids know how you feel about God, abortion, and President Reagan? Kids should know what you are and what you believe. They don't have to agree, but should know as a base."

Dr. Macdonald said the average father spends 14 1/2 minutes a week with his teen-ager. "We as fathers have to give more time to listen and learn to listen," he said.

The physician said people today live in a society that says "if it feels good, do it." He said the objective in life shouldn't be "if the Lowenbrau will be cold when we get down the mountain."

He told the parents in the audience not to delude themselves into thinking that the police, schools, or churches will control drug abuse.

DR. MACDONALD said kids can be taught health habits. He said a 1981 survey taken among high school seniors showed that 75 percent disapproved of using marijuana and that most kids today perceive tobacco as dangerous.

He said parents have great instinctive abilities, and develop a feel about their children, sensing when they're in trouble.

"And never tell anyone not to cry," he said. "It's a great way of releasing stress. Let your son or daughter cry if they hurt. Crying is a marvelous thing."

He encouraged parents to set limits and standards and set examples. "That can't be overstated," he said. "Kids like honest people, they can pick the phonies out."

Dr. Macdonald has addressed a variety of audiences nationwide about drug abuse. He was a member of the board of directors of the National Federation of Parents for Drug-Free Youth and is Director of Clinical Research for Straight Inc. and president of the Scientific Advisory Board of the American Council on Marijuana.