

the Putnam Valley Health Advisory Council presents . . .

the HAC Helpline #17

for the Students and Families of the Putnam Valley Central School District

What's in YOUR Medicine Chest?

Sally (not her real name) is a middle aged, loving, responsible, and hardworking parent who has several chronic medical conditions that require medication. She gets periodic debilitating migraines and has arthritis and sciatica, all of which require prescription medication (Fioricet, Vicodin, Valium) from time to time. Her husband Jack is a weekend athlete who has injured his knees and shoulders several times, requiring trips to the orthopedist, outpatient surgeries, and some prescription painkillers, like hydrocodone (Vicodin).

Both of them work full time and are sometimes exposed to cold and flu bugs that can slow them down, so they keep over-the-counter cold medications like Nyquil and Coricidin around, just in case. Because Sally travels for her job, sometimes very long distances, she bought some Tylenol PM to help her rest on planes or in hotels.

Their daughter, Amy, has been having a rough junior year in high school, worrying about her academics, about going to college, and all of the other challenges that today's teenagers face. Her friend Jake is a football player. Amy knows that Jake relies on over the counter painkillers to help him get through his games without hurting too much. One day when she is feeling really down and depressed, Amy decides to see if there is something she can take that will make her feel better, help her sleep. She takes some of her mom's Tylenol PM from the medicine chest. Later she sees something called hydrocodone in the kitchen cabinet next to the vitamins, left over from her dad's last sports injury, and the label says "for pain." Sounds good to Amy. Later, while her parents are asleep Amy feels a headache coming on and grabs a couple of of her mom's Fioricet pills from the prescription bottle in the medicine chest. Later on she takes another, and washes it down with some Nyquil.

In one evening, Amy has taken acetaminophen, diphenhydramine (a sedating antihistamine), codeine (a narcotic), caffeine, butalbital (a barbiturate), dextromethorphan (a dissociative a hallucinogenic) and doxylamine succinate (a hypnotic antihistamine). Over time, the amount of

acetaminophen alone in this combination of drugs could lead to liver failure and death. Does this sound unlikely? It's not. It happens all the time.

According to www.freevibe.com, a website created for the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, some students talk of "toning down the pressure" by misusing or abusing painkillers and sedatives. But the effects wear off and leave those teens with even more problems than before. Sources of stressful feelings can include:

- ◆ The importance of friendships, romantic relationships, and family life;
 - ◆ Competition for college entrance, including competition for Advanced Placement and Honors courses in high school and worries about SAT scores;
 - ◆ The balance between school work, grades, and extracurricular activities like sports and clubs; and/or
 - ◆ The desire to have the "ideal" physical appearance.
- [http://www.freevibe.com/Drug_Facts/prescription_whatsdriving.asp]

What Can Parents Do?

Talk to your children about drugs—all drugs—legal and illegal ones, prescription and over-the-counter ones

Lock up medications that you need to keep and throw away the ones you don't need any more.

Model good behavior—talk about what medications are for and when they should be used and/or avoided.

**Pay attention to what your child is doing:
Does he/she stop at the store before going out with friends? Is he/she secretive about a backpack or a dresser drawer?**

**If you suspect your child is using medicine inappropriately, get help:
Talk to your pediatrician or a school counselor.
Visit <http://www.drugfree.org/Intervention/HelpingOthers>**

About the PV Health Advisory Council For more than 15 years, The Putnam Valley Health Advisory Council has been quietly taking responsibility for improving the health, safety, and well being of the children of the Putnam Valley Central School District, as well as the community at large. This group of teachers, parents, physicians, nurses, law enforcement, administrators and students meets monthly throughout the school year and the summer and sponsors community events and programs aimed at educating and informing the children and parents of Putnam Valley.