

Incarcerated addicts difficult for local jails to deal with



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Alma College chemistry professor Dr. Scott Hill (left) visits with guest lecturer Dr. R. Corey Waller during a break between two different presentations held at the college last week aimed at medical professionals and students. (Herald photo – Horvath)

by Rosemary Horvath For the Herald

Policy expert and neural scientist Dr. R. Corey Waller described a scenario characteristic of most county jails today, including Gratiot County's, during a lecture last week at Alma College. When municipalities are "treatment deserts," he said, law enforcement ends up dealing with out of control drug addicts as jails become de facto medical rooms. The sad commentary is that neither law enforcement

or jail staffs are trained or equipped to help wean addicts off their addictions, he said

Waller was invited to address this community [health](#) issue by Alma College, Child Advocacy, Gratiot County Community Mental Health, Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition and Mid Michigan District Health Department. He previously was addiction and emergency medicine specialist with Spectrum Health in Lansing and president of Michigan [Society](#) of Addiction Medicine. He currently is senior medical director for education and policy in the Greater Philadelphia area.

His lecture was attended by medical professionals, educators, [court](#) personnel, law enforcement, counselors, coaches and parents. Waller later in the day spoke to college students.

Twenty percent of the nation's adult population has a substance abuse disorder. Heroin and opioid addiction is the number one cause of death of people between the ages of 25 and 32.

Here's what you do: get the community to work together. This includes schools, law enforcement and all facets of society. Use science data to lead and guide the effort.

More importantly, he said, remove the stigma crippling addicts to encourage them to show up for treatment, because it will take three to five years for recovery.

People convicted of drug crimes are made into non-citizens and sometimes permanently homeless and jobless.

When they are convicted of felonies, "we end up with someone who pays forever for their disease. Even those convicted of nonviolent felonies cannot get a job and are permanently in a poor economic position they can't climb out of."

Community drug courts like the one functioning in Gratiot and Montcalm circuit courts are set up to deal with low-level crimes and avoid jail.

“This can be an opportunity to get that person help without a permanent mark on his record,” Waller said.

Waller had a role in helping to draft the federal Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 that President Obama signed into law in July. The bipartisan legislation reversed the national drug policy away from punishment and more toward rehabilitation.

Congress historically has underfunded mental health and substance abuse programs. As it turned out, CARA would be no different.

While the bill laid out the steps for communities to set up treatment centers and address the opioid epidemic, Senate Republicans blocked an appropriation and “gave it zero gas — no monetary appropriation,” Waller said.

He talked about various options used for treatment. Medication-assisted treatment such as methadone is 10 times superior to standard treatment. But this option has its critics who believe addictions stem from character flaws. They just have to stop taking opioids is the common sentiment that Waller insists must change.

“We have to get beyond that stigma,” and he added 75 percent of people in methadone programs will be in remission in one year.

But there is no silver bullet for all situations.

There are long-term behavioral therapies once addictions are controlled.

Buprenorphine is used to treat opioid addiction in higher doses.

All circumstances however require wraparound services such as counseling, support groups, crisis help and transportation assistance.

Waller warned of the possibility for relapses.

A diabetic isn’t kicked out of a medical practice if he has a relapse; nor should an addict be kicked out of treatment program, he said.

When asked how to avoid using stimulants when trying to cope with stress, Waller replied, “Coping is something you learn how to do.”

Stress is fear out of proportion to a response. Stress with a pathological reaction causes panic. A superior medication is mindfulness meditation that changes the structure of the brain, he said.