

Idaho Falls Post Register, Monday, May 12, 2008 – by Heather Wells (2 pages)

Hospitals team up to inform public about dangers of methamphetamine use

Shelley Mitchell understands the dangers of using methamphetamine -- she was hooked on it for years. But in an effort to help others, the 33-year-old has made it her life mission to go around the state to get a simple message out: Don't even try methamphetamine once.

"I think talking has given back to the community what I took out for so many years," Mitchell said.

She's one of two speakers at an educational forum hosted this week by Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center and Mountain View Hospital. The forum is another step in helping the community realize the dangers of meth, EIRMC spokeswoman Cindy Smith-Putnam said.

EIRMC and Mountain View joined forces months ago to help spread the word about the Idaho Meth Project, a graphic ad campaign patterned after one launched in 2005 in Montana. It's worked wonders in Montana, which has gone from fifth worst in the nation for meth use to 39th.

Many Idahoans, including Mitchell, are confident Idaho will see similar results. "We have such a drug problem, and people are making a difference," Mitchell said. She's been telling her story since 2004 to students in local school districts, facilities with the Department of Correction and community forums. "If I make a difference in one kid's life, then it's been worth it," Mitchell said.

A 1992 Challis High School graduate, she started using meth as a student at Boise State University. Eventually, she started living out of her car and going to parties with another user named Trent. Years later, the couple rented a house after she got pregnant with their first son. That's when she started making the stuff. Even after a short stint in the Ada County Jail, Mitchell continued for several years to make and use methamphetamine.

That all changed July 10, 2003. Mitchell's meth lab exploded, with her, her four children and then-husband Trent inside. The children were hurt, but not as badly as Mitchell: The blast left third-degree burns on more than 50 percent of her body. Trent suffered minor injuries.

Eight surgeries and two months later, Mitchell said she realized it was time to start the long road back to life without meth. She hasn't touched the drug since then. "I was given another chance at life, and I'm not going to waste this one," Mitchell said.

Free family forum

Mountain View Hospital and Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center will host their free family forum at 7 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in the Eastern Idaho Technical College Healthcare Building auditorium. Due to the content, organizers ask that children younger than 10 don't attend.

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What is methamphetamine?

The main ingredient in meth is a drug called pseudoephedrine (the active ingredient in over-the-counter cold medicines). The drug creates a lethal mixture when combined with other chemicals. Take a look at some of the other chemicals in meth:

- Hydrochloric acid: A highly acidic chemical that can cause chemical burns to the eyes, nose and skin, and severe respiratory problems.
- Acetone: A chemical that comes from nail polish remover or camp stove fuel and can cause severe gastric irritation and coma.
- Red phosphorus: The vapors can irritate your nose, throat, lungs and eyes. The chemical is typically made from ground-up matches or emergency road flares.

Did you know?

Idaho methamphetamine facts

- Thirty percent of young adults and 14 percent of teens say someone has offered them meth or tried to get them to use it.
- One in 25 teens has admitted to trying the drug.
- About 36 percent of teens say they've never discussed the subject of meth with their parents.
- Sixty-nine percent of parents believe it would be somewhat easy for their kids to acquire the drug.
- Fifteen percent of 12- to 24-year-olds see little or no risk in trying meth once or twice.

Source: Idaho Meth Project