

Plays promote prevention of drug abuse

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A new study finds that theatrical drama is an educational tool in the fight against drug addiction and abuse. Research published today in *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Policy*, shows that after watching the play *Tunnels* – a series of six vignettes depicting the effects of alcohol and drug abuse – over half of the audience left the theatre wanting to get involved directly in drug and alcohol prevention in their homes and communities.

Tunnels was inspired by 'life stories' developed by counsellors and researchers working in the substance abuse field and by Howard Craft, the local playwright who authored the play. The production was performed six times under the direction of Karen Dacons-Brock at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). The NCCU research team, led by Allyn Howlett and graduate student Aileen Stephens-Hernandez, asked the Durham, NC audience to fill out a 22-question survey as they entered the theatre lobby, together with a further post-performance survey. A follow-up telephone survey was then carried out three months after the play was shown, to assess people's participation in preventing drug abuse.

Almost half of those seeing the play said beforehand that they sometimes participated in some form of drug abuse prevention activities. Three months following the play, however, almost all those surveyed reported some involvement in prevention, either by generating discussions among their families and friends, or within their community by making charitable donations to organisations fighting addiction. Everyone could identify at least one memorable scene within the play,

and nearly all believed that the scenes were life-like.

Discussions of drug and alcohol use and abuse can be difficult, and Howlett et al. have shown that plays and other forms of entertainment should be considered useful tools to help education and communication about these life-threatening issues.

"Prevention begins with the awareness that the problem of drug and alcohol abuse exists in our culture," says Howlett, "and that each of us can make an impact on this problem within the family unit and other close social networks."

Source: BioMed Central

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