

good health

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BATTLING AN EPIDEMIC

The Oxford Centre offers treatment for addiction

By JONATHAN SCOTT
News Editor

BRUCE NEWMAN

Stephen Pannell (from l.), Billy Young and Tom Fowlkes provide treatment for those battling addiction at The Oxford Centre.

Addictions to drugs and alcohol are not new, but the demand to provide some sort of treatment to those with these addictions has never been greater.

In addition to alcoholism and illegal drug addiction, Oxford doctor Tom Fowlkes said he has seen another growing problem in the world of substance abuse: “We are in the midst of an epidemic of prescription drug abuse in America.”

People of all ages and socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds are abusing prescription drugs, Fowlkes said. Some of the most commonly abused prescription drugs include Lortab, Xanax and Adderall.

“Hydrocodone, an opiate pain medication in drugs like Lortab, is the most widely prescribed drug in America,” Fowlkes said. “This epidemic of prescription drug abuse is worst in the

Southeast and in New England.”

New resource

To help combat this epidemic, Fowlkes partnered with a veteran director of addiction-treatment facilities to open The Oxford Centre, a comprehensive addiction treatment facility located in rural northeastern Lafayette County.

The facility began treating patients in January 2012, but it filled quickly. Now, a year and a half since it opened, The Oxford Centre has doubled its capacity to keep up with demand.

“There has been a huge need for substance abuse treatment in our area,” said Fowlkes, the chief medical officer for The Oxford Centre.

Since his practice has included those who struggle with substance abuse, Fowlkes said he’s seen the prevalence of crack and crystal meth abuse give way to prescription drug addiction.

This type of substance abuse comes with its own unique set of problems, he said.

“First, once you are addicted to them, you usually cannot just stop taking them on your own,” he said. “A person will have very severe withdrawal symptoms and needs to be detoxed in a medical facility.

“Second, taking too much of these drugs will kill you. Drug overdose deaths have replaced car wrecks as the leading cause of accidental deaths among young people in many states.”

At The Oxford Centre, Fowlkes said 80 percent of the clinic’s admissions are due to prescription drug abuse.

“That is because it is nearly impossible to stop using these drugs on your own without treatment,” he said.

Responding to need

Fowlkes, a board certified emergency physician, sees patients at the medical



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The Oxford Centre includes a lakeside pavilion, fitness center and ropes course.

clinic he founded in 2009 in Eastgate Plaza on University Avenue. In response to patient needs, he earned an additional board certification as an addiction medicine specialist.

The Oxford Centre provides medical detoxification and stabilization as well as residential treatment services and a continuum of support after treatment.

While all addictive disorders are treated, the center has a specific focus on the successful treatment of opiate dependency.

“The medical world is beginning to realize that addiction is a chronic disease that requires long-term management,” Fowlkes said. “It’s similar to diseases like diabetes, in that it’s not something you simply treat overnight. It requires long-term support, and that’s what we’re able to offer.”

The Oxford Centre is situated on 110 acres of rolling hills some 16 miles east of Oxford. It provides a serene setting where those who struggle with addiction disorders can step out of

their everyday environments to enter a 30- to 40-day treatment program.

The facility includes a lakeside pavilion, fitness center and ropes course. At the main lodge, patients gather for group-therapy sessions and share each other’s trials and triumphs. Music therapy and equine therapy add further dimensions to the healing process.

As part of The Oxford Centre’s expansion this fall, a new medical services facility provides an enhanced setting for safe detox and stabilization — critical steps in the recovery process. The addition of new cabins will give The Oxford Centre the ability to serve up to 52 patients.

Completing the picture is The Oxford Centre’s outpatient services office, located adjacent to Fowlkes’ clinic on University Avenue.

Outpatient treatment allows patients to work or attend school while receiving counseling, education and, in some cases, medical services for substance use and abuse. Services

provided at the outpatient center also include drug and alcohol assessments, drug testing and intervention services.

Team approach

Staff at The Oxford Centre include licensed nursing personnel, master’s-level therapists experienced in addiction treatment, and certified alcohol and drug counselors. Experiential therapists specialize in equine, music, creative arts and ropes course therapies.

Clinical Director Stephen Pannel, MD, is board certified in adult psychiatry with a specialty in co-occurring disorders.

Leading The Oxford Centre’s management is CEO Billy Young, a 30-year veteran of the addiction-treatment field. A native Mississippian, his prior experience includes serving as executive director of Pine Grove Recovery Center in Hattiesburg. Most recently, he served as CEO of Remuda Ranch in Wickenburg, Ariz., the largest provider of eating-disorder treatment in

the nation.

“North Mississippi is fortunate to have several excellent acute-care treatment providers, but limited residential programs,” Young said. “The Oxford Centre was designed to meet this growing need.

“Our goal is to provide patients and families with quality, cost-effective addiction treatment services.”

The Oxford Centre is licensed through the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Services. The center is accredited by CARF International and is a member of the National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers.

While not Medicaid eligible, the center accepts most commercial insurances.

For more information on The Oxford Centre, call 662-281-9992 or visit theoxfordcentre.org.

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Is someone you know in need of treatment for addiction?

When it comes to who gets addicted to drugs, whether illegal or prescribed, there are no stereotypes. Addiction can affect people from all socio-economic backgrounds and all cultures.

So how can you tell whether a friend or family member is struggling with a drug problem?

Dr. Tom Fowlkes, chief medical officer for The Oxford Centre, said there are some fairly common clues to substance abuse.

“With illegal drugs, usually a person will attempt to hide their drug use from those close to them who do not use,” Fowlkes said. “Family and friends can look for signs such as mood swings, erratic behavior, poor job performance, neglecting family responsibilities, unexplained absences and repeated lying or evasiveness.

“With prescription pills, often a person got a prescription initially for a legitimate medical reason, but is now

abusing that medicine and has become addicted to it. Clues to watch for include running out of the prescription early, going to multiple clinics for the same medicine, trading or getting medicine from other people, apparently getting worse despite taking more of the medicine, and repeated instances of lost or stolen medicine.”

At what point does drug or alcohol use become a danger to the user or others?

“A person’s substance use needs to be addressed when it causes problems in areas such as: financial, legal, job, family and friends, health, or causes moral or spiritual conflict,” Fowlkes said. “Hallmarks of addiction include continued use despite problems caused by use of the substance, inability to stop using despite attempts to do so, and cravings or pre-occupation with use that interferes with a person’s ability to function.”

—Jonathan Scott

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