

Message from Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, Minister of Health

Drug Awareness Month - November 2012

“Mek Wi Protect Wi Yutes from Substance Abuse”

Drug Awareness Month is a time to reflect on the dangers posed by substance abuse. This year's theme is therefore apt as one of the most vulnerable groups exposed to illicit drugs are our youth, who often fall prey due to peer pressure, as a coping mechanism for various types of stress, or just out of the natural curiosity of young persons, among other motivations.

It is a slippery slope from experimentation to addiction and our young people must be guarded from the dangers of drugs.

As Minister of Health, I commend the National Council on Drug Abuse on your unstinting work to effect increased awareness and positive behavior change with regard to safeguarding the vulnerable from drug abuse.

I am aware of the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, in which data has shown a steady increase in the use of and exposure to tobacco among young persons. There was a 10% increase from 2001 to 2010 in the number of adolescents who reported ever smoking a cigarette (34% to 44%). Similarly there was a 10% increase in the adolescents who reported that others in their home smoke, from 30% in 2001 to 40% in 2010. Those who said they were "around others who smoke cigarettes" increased from 60% in 2001 to 67% in 2010.

The influence of peers determines the choices made by adolescents. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey found that there was an increase in the number of adolescents who reported that all or most of their friends smoked, up from 7.4% in 2001 to 14.1% in 2010. Most young people do not consider the long-term health consequences associated with tobacco use when they start smoking. Among those who persist in smoking, one third will die about 13 years earlier than their non-smoking peers.

The Ministry of Health is currently in the process of revising a Draft Tobacco Control Act that will provide sweeping protection against unwanted tobacco exposure. Tobacco use remains a leading cause of cancers, heart disease and a range of other avoidable illnesses and

we intend to curtail tobacco use in the public space as one method in reducing these conditions. Passive smoking legislation is expected to be taken to parliament by the first quarter of the 2013-14 financial year.

Some six million persons die annually from tobacco smoking, while 600,000 persons die from passive smoking according to WHO estimates - this is untenable.

The next time you see or hear of an adolescent smoking, seek to preserve and protect their health. Urge them to stop!

Our youth are the future and protecting them from exposure to harmful addictive substances will go a far way in preserving their future.

May your month of activities be successful and I hope that you will find a renewed commitment to continue the good work of the NCDA.

Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, DDS MP

Minister of Health

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