

Three Minute **WARNING**



A peninsula general practitioner has launched a campaign urging teenagers to act in a drugs crisis and help save lives.

Peninsula GP Themis Garagounis is not one to preach to teenagers about saying no to drugs. In fact he realises that the likelihood is most teens will experiment at some point.

What he is all about is saving lives. With this in mind, he has launched an awareness program aimed at showing teenagers how to respond in an emergency when a friend gets into difficulty through drugs or drink. The campaign says – ‘3 minutes – All it takes to save your mate’.

Why 3 minutes? “Because that’s all the time you have to act before the brain starts to die,” explains Dr Themis.

There are almost 400 deaths a year related to drink and drugs, more than one a day.

Dr Themis says, “People don’t act in time or they run away. They panic, they think they don’t have the knowledge and they are afraid they will be arrested.”

Dr Themis believes the drug education in high schools is fantastic and his ‘3 Minute’ program complements what the children are already being taught. He is about equipping teenagers with three simple rules to follow if a friend keels over:

- Turn them on their side
- Dial 000
- Wait until the ambulance arrives

He believes these simple steps will have a dramatic impact on the number of deaths from experimenting with drugs and drink. “One of the main themes coming out in the media both here and overseas at the moment, is that the thing that’s having the most effect on drug-related deaths is the lack of action, or bystanders being indecisive and acting too late to do something to help,” he adds.

Dr Themis says that in a recent study one in

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four teenagers admitted to taking drugs but he says this is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg.

"Through my medical practice, I have seen day in and day out the problems teens encounter when it comes to drugs," he explains. He says that once teenagers drink they are less likely to remember all the lessons they have been taught.

"I would like to get the kids well before a crisis arises. They drink and they become uninhibited. Teenagers already think they are invincible – give them alcohol and they are even more invincible," he adds.

With 22 years of experience under his belt, Dr Themis had a practice in Warriewood for 10 years and now works from a surgery in Warringah Mall. He wants to see his program extended to schools and teenagers throughout Sydney and further afield. He says a number of high schools on the Northern Beaches have already expressed an interest

in introducing his 3 Minute program to pupils.

Dr Themis says his aim is also to educate teenagers about the fact that drugs can be laced with different substances that are harmful, and they are often unaware of exactly what they are putting into their bodies.

And he wants to teach parents the signs to look out for that might signal their child has an addiction problem.

"I want to teach parents how to recognise the signs. To ask, 'Is this normal teenage behaviour?' and if it's not, to do something about it without being judgmental."

Dr Themis says no-one ever recovers from losing a friend or a child so acting before it gets to this dreadful situation is the way forward. "There's nothing worse than feeling like you could have done something and didn't."

What Dr Themis also wants to get across to teenagers is, "You might experiment but what you must not do is die from it." **P.**

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