

Meth use danger dwarfs other street drugs, experts say



ANTHONY SOUFFLE / MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE FILES

Methamphetamine is the drug of choice in Winnipeg, a criminal defence attorney says.

RYAN THORPE

CRIMINAL defence attorney Mike Cook has a close-up view of the destructive effects methamphetamine has on Winnipeg.

"It is, by far, the drug of choice. It's the most dangerous and it causes the most havoc in our community," Cook said at the annual crime prevention breakfast on Thursday.

Cook serves as president of the Manitoba Criminal Justice Association, which organized the breakfast to kick off Manitoba crime prevention month.

This year, when choosing a topic for the event, Cook said it was clear meth use is a pressing concern that contributes to crime.

"We read about crystal metham-

phetamine every day in the newspaper, on the radio, on television. It's very high on the public profile, in terms of the things we have to correct," he said.

Cook believes an important and often under-discussed tool in the battle against the meth crisis is effective addiction treatment. That's why the association invited Scott and Anne Oake to be this year's keynote speakers.

The Oake family is spearheading a treatment centre, the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, in Winnipeg. Scott, the *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcaster, and Anne shared their family's tragic story once again.

While not a meth addict, their son Bruce battled addiction for years, including many stints in detox facilities. He died of a heroin overdose at the

age of 25 in 2011.

"The sad truth is that he died in a bathroom stall at his local pub," Anr said.

Cook said at one time opioids, such as heroin and fentanyl, were the worst drugs on the street, but that's not the case any longer.

As an attorney, he said he routinely deals with clients who are addicted to meth, and the stories they tell him about their drug use are unlike anything he's ever heard.

"You might think, 'Oh, it's just another drug.' Well, it's far from that. People get visual hallucinations. I as clients, 'What do you mean by that?' And they say, 'Well, we see things that we know aren't there,'" Cook said.

● METH, CONTINUED ON A2

Friday, 02.11.2018 Pag.A001

Copyright (c)2018 Winnipeg Free Press, Edition 11/2/2018

METH ● FROM A1

"They all talk about these people called the 'shadow people.' They say, 'They're people who you see but they're not really there.' These people they see, they regard as demons. They have this demonic sense about them.... They're supernatural beings they think are after them."

It's the paranoid visual and auditory hallucinations, as well as the ways the chemical compounds of meth ravage the brain, that make it such a dangerous drug that turns so many people violent, Cook said.

He believes it will take continued efforts from all levels of government, as well as co-operation and collaboration between front-line workers from the health-care, legal and law-enforcement sectors to make a dent in the crisis.

Cook said events such as Thursday's breakfast, in which experts, front-line workers and the public discuss issues and potential solutions, are important in the fight against drugs.

"It's going to take a lot of work because crystal meth is everywhere. Clients have kind of abandoned the other drugs they used to use," he said.

"It is, by far, the drug of choice. It's the most dangerous and it causes the most havoc in our community."

The event was attended by a who's who of Manitoba criminal justice, including Winnipeg Police Service Chief Danny Smyth, Manitoba RCMP commanding officer Scott Kolody and Justice Minister Cliff Cullen.



Manitoba Criminal Justice Association president Mike Cook shares his observations about meth users at the crime prevention gathering

ryan.thorpe@freepress.mb.ca
Twitter: @rk_thorpe