

COVENTRY

# Life or death decision



Photo by Kendra Leigh Miller

Jennifer Thiele, a Coventry High School graduate and now a pharmacist for CVS, spoke Thursday to an assembly of juniors at the school about the life-threatening dangers of prescription drug addiction.

## Pharmacist, Coventry High graduate talks about the dangers of prescription drug abuse

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COVENTRY — It wasn't too long ago when Jennifer Thiele, now a CVS pharmacist, sat in the same auditorium seats where the junior class sat before her to learn firsthand about the real dangers of addiction to prescription drugs.

Since graduating in 2010, going on to study pharmacy and now being at CVS, she said she sees so many patients in a day or week who are taking prescribed drugs designed to help counter the negative effects of withdrawal from other drugs.

She spoke about many friends and some

family members who have fought the battle of addiction, some with success, some not.

"It's about making choices," Thiele said. "You don't wake up one day and just decide you're going to use drugs. You're influenced over time and choices can change everything."

In her presentation, she said the United States makes up only five percent of the world's population but is responsible for 99 percent of the world's use of hydrocodone.

While its use is only intended for short-term, after surgery or a serious accident, it

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# Drugs

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has a very high risk of dependency. And while some believe prescription drugs are safer because they're doctor prescribed, they become unsafe with abuse. Another tragic statistic is that prescription drug fatalities now outnumber traffic fatalities.

"When I was in high school, the drug choice was weed and we didn't know anything else existed," she said. "When it was offered, I said no. My group of friends left me but after a short time, I made a new group of friends who accepted me for who I was."

A short video was shown that featured four typical high school students who all fought battles with addiction.

Two survived, one passed away and another suffered permanent brain damage.

The teens in the film, along with their parents, shared their stories about how the drugs changed their personalities and took them away from family and friends and took over their lives.

Thiele pointed out that, as simple as it may seem, having people you can turn to, regardless of who that is, to talk to if someone needs help, could save a life.

"I've lost patients who I considered friends," she said.

Deborah Parente spoke about losing her son last November to drug addiction.

She asked the students in the audience to pretend their mother or father were the ones at the podium speaking.

"I'm hoping to have some impact on you, so you'll have a happy ending," she said. "I lost my son, Peter, on November 22. He was 25 years old."

Parente said her son began using drugs in 2009. After many visits to reha-

bilitation places, relapses, false promises and more room searches coming up with paraphernalia she wished she's never seen through the years, it came down to just one night when her son suffered a heart attack and lost brain activity, which caused paralysis.

"Imagine being a parent and watching your child have a heart attack and suffer brain damage and trying to breathe," she said.

Her main message was that she hoped kids never got themselves into it because the damage is indescribable and so hard to overcome.

"CVS has realized the magnitude of the situation and has sent out pharmacists in the area to spread awareness," she said. "You all need to be here, right now, listening to this because in some shape or form, it will effect you," stated Coventry High School Assistant Principal Brooke Macomber.