

Dr. Bernard Fialkoff



The Good Fight

Townie builds a network to bring the truth about drugs to even the toughest streets



Fialkoff as a keynote speaker at a United Nations event covering education.



From left to right: Miss New York 2013 Amanda Mason, Fialkoff, National Latino Officers Association Executive Director Anthony Miranda, Julio Diaz of the New York Police Department, David Tidman, Miss New York 2016 Camille Sims and Mrs. Maria Fialkoff ride the Drug Free World float at the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York.

Opioid abuse. The phrase was hardly in the vocabulary at the turn of the millennium, but today we read about it daily in the press.

- We're pressed to take a stand by the surgeon general.¹
- E-Prescribe took heed and made it a full-court press to prevent its abuse.
- And an apprehensive American Dental Association has pressed the emergency button, making opioid/opiate education a mandatory course for its membership.²

Our country, and the dental industry, is in a crisis of historic magnitude. Prescription drug abuse is a bona fide epidemic in the U.S.; four out of every 10 fatal drug overdoses are the result of prescription painkiller abuse.³ A 2014 study found that 40 percent of dental patients reported some form of nonmedical use of prescription opioids.⁴

The drama doesn't end there. In the U.S. "there are indications of a partial shift in the use of opioids toward heroin use," according to the most recent World Drug Report of the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The researchers cite an increase in the number of heroin-related deaths from 5,925 in 2012 to 8,257 in 2013—the highest level in a decade, and one the UNODC says is on a continuous rise.⁵

No longer solely a problem of the inner city, heroin's resurgence in America is now also a suburban and middle-class phenomenon.⁶

Rather than wallowing in the flood of worsening news, one New York dentist has come up with a plan to help concerned professionals do something that can help their practices—and the dental field as a whole—play a role in the prevention drug addiction.

Stepping Up


In 2006, alarmed by the destructive path drug abuse was carving in New York City and its surrounds, Dr. Bernard Fialkoff established the New York chapter of Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a public benefit organization that provides youth and adults with factual information about drugs so they can make informed decisions and live drug-free. Through a worldwide network of volunteers—and working with more than 800 police, government and community partners and alliances—62 million educational booklets have been distributed, tens of thousands of drug awareness events have been held, and public service announcements have reached more than 260 million viewers in 123 countries.⁷

Fialkoff, a Townie since 2011, first embraced the fledgling "Truth About Drugs" movement by bringing the foundation's

youth-friendly booklets to inner city educators in want of "nothing but the facts" about drugs that were lurking in the shadows, the streets and the schoolyards. His first presentation benefited Bronx preteens at a New York City Department of Youth and Community Development after-school program. Unsure of the result, he soon found reason to carry on, thanks to a letter from a young attendee: "Your speech caused an impact on us, now we all look at things differently. I apply what I learned in your workshop to my daily life."

Within two years, Fialkoff's chapter conducted more than 200 events. Feedback poured in, including a report from a teacher who, astonished by her youngsters' ongoing dialogue, wrote, "The participants continued to talk about what they understood from the presentation for the next couple of days."

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Hearing of the positive results from the implementation of the program,⁸ the New York Department of Education requested that the chapter provide curriculums to all its Manhattan substance abuse counselors.

Forming partnerships with the New York Parks Department, the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, the Police Athletic League,⁹ the United Nations NGOs¹⁰ and the Miss New York Organization,¹¹ Fialkoff decided to bring the “Truth About Drugs” campaign to those challenged daily by drug-related crime and tragedy on the street: law enforcement officials and officers. He started with the NYPD School Safety Officers, campus cops posted in the New York school system. Training sessions started with safety officers from the Brooklyn South branch and the rest followed, borough by borough, requesting their own events. Fialkoff had his hands full, training agents in Staten Island, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan until he had effectively trained all 5,000 officers and agents in the city.¹²

Seeing the reach for effective drug education materials and the need for health professionals to take a leading role, Fialkoff presented



Fialkoff and Miss New York 2015 Jamie Lynn Macchia with students after a drug education and prevention presentation at a New York school.

the program at the Greater New York Dental Meeting,¹³ the Greater Long Island Dental Meeting, the Queens County Dental Society and the CONAOD XXI convention in the Dominican Republic,¹⁴ signing up dentists from around the world to participate.

By 2015, the New York Drug Free World chapter had presented to more than 100,000 teens in New York, with a resultant 19 percent drug abuse drop in youth.

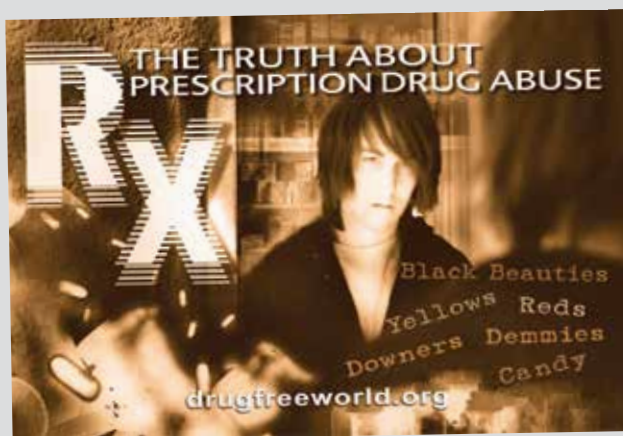
Joining the **Drug-Free** Movement

The fastest, most effective way to deliver the truth about drugs to your community begins with a study of drugfreeworld.com’s booklets and videos, which viewers can order any or all of the 14 booklets in the “Truth About Drugs” series, including “The Truth About Prescription Drug Abuse,” “The Truth About Painkillers” and “The Truth About Heroin.” And they’re all free.

For community presentations to groups and schools, order the “Truth About Drugs” education package, which includes a 19-lesson curriculum replete with lesson plans, award-winning PSAs and documentary, posters and booklets.

After conducting several presentations, dentists can request proclamations from their local council members. These can be displayed in

waiting rooms, and photos can be sent to local dental societies for coverage in newsletters. National dental publications can also highlight these events, generating a groundswell of health care professionals actively working to improve their communities, aiding constituent dental societies’ initiatives of controlling drug abuse, and turn the tide on opioid and opiate abuse.



Youth and adult versions of the Drug-Free Pledge are also available online to post and promote for signatures at community events and activities.

And for those dentists looking to educate health care professionals on the program, Fialkoff’s organization provides training on how to create and host drug awareness and prevention events.

“We can as leaders help to change all of the downturn that has occurred over the past decade,” says Fialkoff. “The ‘Truth About Drugs’ program honestly educates the very children who will in short order be in charge of our futures and country. The American Dental Association and each one of us will be recognized as those who turned things around in a time of vital need.”



Fialkoff and Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams with attendees at an interfaith seminar, at which they trained religious leaders on drug education and awareness.

Activating activist professionals

With this momentum going for him,¹⁵ Fialkoff had specific goals for expanding the program and involving dentists nationwide so they could play a leading role in effectively dealing with the opioid explosion.

First: Training law enforcement officers and educators nationwide so the free “Truth About Drugs” curriculum could be implemented in schools across the country without burdening taxpayers.

Second: Training dentists throughout the U.S. on how to conduct lessons from the curriculum. By tackling drug issues through prevention, these dentists would be recognized for taking a leading role in helping their communities learn and avert the dangers of drugs.

Last year marked the launch of Fialkoff’s dentist training tour to practices and local professional associations throughout New York, where several dentists have started delivering their own drug education events utilizing the curriculum. A few examples:

- Dr. Robert Trager, 2016 president of the Nassau County Dental Society, sponsored a drug education booth at the Greater Long Island Dental Meeting, distributing hundreds of free booklets,¹⁶ and conducted a training session on synthetic drugs for the NYPD along with fellow New York dentist Dr. Batool Rizvi.¹⁷
- Dr. Edward Portnoy, a Bayside cosmetic dentist, played a part in a training session for the NYPD school safety agents, having contributed to lectures dating back to 2012. Portnoy’s

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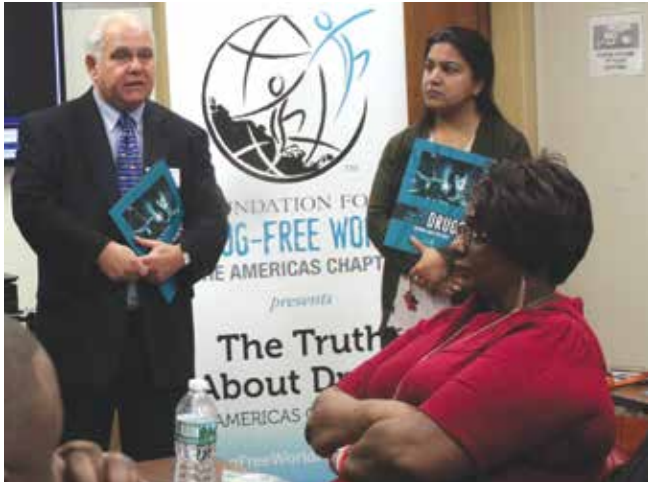
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Drs. Robert Trager and Batoool Rizvi conduct a "Truth about Synthetic Drugs" seminar with about 15 New York Police Department agents in Queens in February. The training was conducted Mondays and Tuesdays for about 16 weeks.

dedication was rewarded by Susan Seinfeld, president of Community Council 11 in Queens, who presented the doctor with a Community Leader Award.^{18,19} "As a dentist who treats whole families, I get close with all the generations," Portnoy explains. "Unfortunately, we have seen firsthand families devastated by drugs. If we feel that we get close to and care for the people we treat, then we have a moral obligation to educate them on the problems with drugs the same way we would educate our own families."

- Drs. Daniel Weinstein, Elie Marzouk, Alan Schwartz and Fernando Cordero, all Townies, joined the team in providing free events to the community: "The program teaches children that life involves many choices, and we are all responsible for our own choices," they said. "As dentists, we have a responsibility to our patients to set an example of kindness and caring. We don't just look through blinders to find a hole in a tooth, fill it and feel that our work is done. We are treating human



Dr. Edward Portnoy of Bayside, New York, has been active with the Drug Free World program for years. Here, he conducts a "Truth about Synthetic Drugs" training seminar in Queens.



Dr. Daniel Weinstein, a Townie who practices in Long Island City, New York, conducted a Drug-Free World training seminar for the New York Police Department in January.

beings, and we care about their entire well-being."

- Dr. Hanette Gomez, a Townie in Howard Beach, New York, takes her "Truth About Drugs" educational booths to neighborhoods and community centers.²⁰ Last August, Gomez hosted two booths for law enforcement's National Night Out, the annual evening in cities and towns nationwide where law enforcement agencies and their community support groups hold street fairs and events to promote cooperation between community leaders and police officers.²¹



Fialkoff and Dr. Fernando Cordero with NYPD Explorers Club.



Dr. Alan Schwartz presenting to his patients.

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