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NLA ambassadors give students the 'dope' on drugs
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Weymouth High School students now have the "straight dope on drugs," thanks to a courageous group of young ambassadors from the National Library of Addiction, which was founded in 1993 by addiction physician Dr. Punyamurtula S. Kishore.

These ambassadors, recovering addicts who are high school graduates, are in a sense ambassadors from another land. Once addicted, the NLA ambassadors have journeyed from a dark place in their lives to take control of their addiction. In a recent one-hour program at Weymouth High for grades 9 through 12, the ambassadors talked about the harmful effects of drug use and abuse, how they got addicted, and how they managed to begin and continue recovery treatment. Dr. Kishore, who has 12 treatment centers across the state, started the ambassador program five years ago. "I began to get a lot of young people in my practice. They were not 'damaged goods' yet, but they were feeling bored all the time. I started the ambassador program so they can give back what they've got," Kishore said. The program gives recovering addicts the opportunity to travel to middle and high schools to spread awareness of the dangers of drugs. The program lets addicts get their stories out and gives them a sense of pride in their recovery. The ambassadors bring warnings about the dangers of addiction and a message of hope for those who are struggling with addiction. Recovery began with surrender, with the addict admitting he or she had a problem and seeking help to overcome the addiction, Kishore said. "When you surrender, you leapfrog. You have your whole mind to focus on something more rewarding in life. You have so much more energy to do so many more things with your life," Dr. Kishore said. "The ambassadors feel very proud. They are turning a negative experience into a positive experience. When you turn a negative into a positive, great things happen." Preventing and treating drug addiction means treating the entire community. "My mission is to teach families and communities, to help families and communities get stronger," Kishore said. Teens carry the message of the dangers of drug addiction to each other. "The kids all hang out at the same pizza place on Friday night," Kishore said. Kishore's practice has grown from a small home office to a statewide practice. Kishore has seen addicts as young as 8 years old, while the median age is 21. In Weymouth alone, Kishore has 200 patients. Addiction medicine was not seen as a specialty until the 1990s, Kishore said. After that time, every hospital needed an addiction physician. Kishore is on staff at a number of area hospitals, including Brigham, Faulkner, Beth Israel, St. Elizabeth's, Deaconess, and Carney. "Addiction is a funny business. In disciplines such as heart surgery, there is one book that is the bible of treatment. The information on treating addiction is gathered in multiple disciplines: treatment involves primary care, physiology, sociology, criminology, public health, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals. The knowledge is staggered in multiple disciplines," Kishore said. Kishore has compiled a collection of thousands of books dealing with drug addiction which has become the National Library of Addiction, modeled after the Kennedy Library. The history of the introduction of heroin into American life is interesting and tragic. The drug, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, at first seemed to be a medical miracle. In 1895, heroin appeared in the United States as an asthma medicine, according to Kishore. In those days, asthma caused many deaths. The drug came in boxes with a picture of a woman holding a tray with the med, a woman who proclaimed herself as a "heroine" to save the afflicted from asthma. The drug did alleviate certain medical conditions and give a sense of well-being; however, it was highly addictive. The unsuspecting user was hooked on the first dose and became dependent on bigger and bigger doses of the drug. "The human brain is like a fine plate of china. One dose of heroin breaks the brain chemistry, so that the user does not feel normal unless they have this crazy glue to hold the brain together," Kishore said. By 1914, heroin was banned in the United States, but its legacy had taken hold. Kishore's program uses unique methods in helping addicts break their addiction. Most programs keep patients in rehabilitation for a short period and then give them other drugs - such as Valium or methadone - to help them cope with their addiction. Out on their own, these patients often start using again. In Kishore's programs, no other drugs are given to the patients. "Methadone is not a good choice for young people. Once on methadone, it is a lifelong process. It becomes a job in itself," Kishore said. Kishore's program revolves around patients talking about their problems and realizing that they need help. "Addiction is a very difficult disease. I see addiction as human physiology gone bonkers. Rebuilding the body is a long, nightmarish task. The recovery process can take an extraordinary amount of time," Kishore said. He monitors his patients to make sure they do not become addicted again. "There is no vaccine for addiction, like there is for the flu," said Kishore. "Words are the vaccine."