

Drugs, mental health issues common with SLT criminals

By Brian Uhler

In the last two months, we shared information about crime in general and about DUI, domestic violence and public intoxication. This month, we will give you information about drug use and mental health.

From January through April:

Reported drug events 37.

Mental health detentions 34.



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Barton Hospital conducts an annual “needs assessment” where they examine the community as a whole from a health perspective. It is of no surprise to us at the SLTPD that the top item on Barton’s list is substance abuse and the second item is mental health.

Regarding drugs, we recently learned that there was a statewide assessment which characterized the drug problem in El Dorado County as being twice as bad as all other counties in California. Of course, drug abuse leads to all kinds of crime problems – particularly property crimes. Some people have the strange belief that drugs should not be a police concern, but only be a matter of public health. If you happen

to be in this group, consider the following:

- One statistical report found that jail inmates convicted of robbery (56 percent), weapons violations (56 percent), burglary (55 percent), or motor vehicle theft (55 percent) were most likely to have reported to be using drugs at the time of the offense.
- Another report found that 76 percent of jail inmates who had a mental health problem were dependent on or abused alcohol or drugs, compared to 53 percent of inmates without a mental health problem.
- In another study, over 30 percent of state prisoners reported that they committed their property crime specifically to get money for drugs.

In short, drug abuse and crime are closely correlated. It seems reasonable to assume that lowering the use of drugs in our community would have a positive effect on crime.

On mental health issues, SLTPD staff members receive special training to ensure such events are handled with sensitivity and care for the affected person. This training includes working with officers and dispatchers so they can effectively recognize those with mental disabilities and sensibly intervene to restore peace when such a person is in crisis.

The El Dorado County Health Department has made significant improvements in the last year, working more closely than ever with law enforcement. A grant was recently approved which helps bolster the connection between the Health Department and law enforcement responders.

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