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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's Christian counseling conference addresses "Alcohol and Drug Abuse"

By Chelsea Whelpley

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For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Ouachita Baptist University's Pruet School of Christian Studies hosted its fifth annual Conference on Issues in Christian Counseling Feb. 27. The event was co-hosted by the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, Henderson State University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

The conference theme, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse," provided pastors, mental health professionals, caregivers and students the opportunity to come together and learn about the causes, effects and problems associated with alcohol and substance abuse as well as training to deal with those issues.

The one-day conference offered participants the opportunity to select among eight sessions led by faculty from each of the sponsoring schools. Sessions covered topics such as resources for therapists, coping strategies for families, ethical considerations in counseling and faith-integrated forms of therapy.

Dr. Bill Viser, conference coordinator and professor of Christian ministries at Ouachita, explained there is a need for "a greater cooperative relationship between pastors and mental health professionals in helping the overwhelming number of people facing problems with alcohol and substance abuse."

During the conference's lunch session, Viser presented "Answers to Adderall Addiction: What You Need to Know," urging participants, "We have to be more proactive. We can do a better job of addressing these issues in different ways."

Citing that 34 percent of college students admit to having used Adderall, and high school students are showing increases in Adderall abuse, Viser said counselors are "presented with a very alarming picture of the problems with Adderall; 40 percent of teens think it's okay to abuse prescription drugs because they are 'safer' than street drugs."

"I learned about different methods to use while counseling but also the practical side about how government and insurance is involved," said Hollan Van Horn, a senior mass communications major from Fayetteville, Ark., who is pursuing a career in counseling after graduation. "The most impactful part of the conference, though, was just being able to sit at a table with five professional women from all different occupations in the counseling world."

Dr. Anita Wells, a psychologist from Paragould, Ark., said it is beneficial to unite caregivers in this setting because "we can receive education information from other caregivers as well as the presenters about drug and alcohol abuse. It is so prevalent in our society, so we are always looking for ways to end that."

Dr. Elizabeth Kelly, assistant professor of sociology at Ouachita, led a session on "Drug & Alcohol Abuse: Current Social Problems," which focused on the cultural implications of substance abuse and what leads users to seek help or not. Kelly noted that common influences of drug and alcohol abusers are the desire "to fit in, to escape or relax, to relieve boredom, to rebel or to experiment."

A total of 2.3 million 12-17 year olds use illegal drugs each year, explained Kelly, and teens are often turning to drugs to combat low self-esteem. Encouraging caregivers to ask the right questions to gain

insight into how to respond to individuals and understand their cultural identity, Kelly added, "Culture can influence the experience and communication of symptoms of depression."

"The instructors were well informed and well prepared," said Bobby Wells, a jail chaplain from Paragould, Ark. He was drawn to the conference because of the faith-based environment and the relevant subject matter. "Most all of the men I deal with are struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, so this was an opportunity for me to learn more about those issues."

For more information, contact Bill Viser at (870) 245-5524 or viserw@obu.edu.