

## **An emergency crusade**

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Dr. Thomas M. Scalea is tired of calling crashes caused by drivers impaired by alcohol or drugs accidents.

Like cancer or heart trouble, the physician-chief of the Maryland Shock Trauma Center views them as diseases. Easily preventable diseases.

If you drink, don't drive. If you do drugs, don't drive.

"It has a prevention strategy," Scalea says. "They are not accidents. They are preventable and predictable events. The more alcohol you have, the more we can predict you will be involved in one."

Nearly half - 41 percent - of the 651 accident fatalities in Maryland in 2006 were alcohol related, according to the latest available numbers from the Maryland State Police.

Scalea said a third of all Shock Trauma patients - those treated for everything from heart attacks to gunshots, as well as car crashes - are impaired by alcohol. Add drugs such as heroin or marijuana to the equation and that number jumps to an astounding 50 percent.

The doctor said that as he gets older, it gets harder for him to tell a mother she just lost her son or a wife she just lost her husband. "It's needless loss of life," he sighs, defining problem drinking not as downing a pint of gin a day, but, "if you go out every Saturday and you wake up on Sunday and you don't know how you got home, that's a problem."

As part of a push to quiet Scalea's scalpel, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems is launching an "It's been done to death" campaign to persuade impaired people to put down their car keys.

Police officers, paramedics and others will be calling local radio stations - 98 Rock is the partner here - and alerting motorists about sobriety checkpoints, giving out drunken driving statistics and even describing in graphic detail crashes they've just handled in hopes of deterring more.

Also, police departments are stepping up road patrols to go after suspected drunk and impaired drivers. The idea is to get more arrests and at the same time keep the issue in the news just as more and more drivers take to the roads during the holidays.

On Dec. 3, the public is invited to Shock Trauma to tour exhibits related to drunk driving, and on Dec. 7, authorities will be outside M&T Bank Stadium for the Ravens game to push the message even more.

Beverly Dearing-Stuck is a nurse at Shock Trauma and runs the prevention education program for high-risk teens and adult DWI offenders. She takes some on tours of the center and shows videos of crashes and the aftermath to both educate and shock problem drivers.

She was doing this work as far back as 1995, when her father-in-law, Milton Stuck, was killed by an impaired motorist. The driver, who had a revoked license, had heroin and marijuana in his system when he drove his truck the wrong way on a rural road in Baltimore County and hit Stuck's car head-on.

He was convicted of automobile manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years in prison. He served less than three years. "The issue is even more important to me now," Dearing-Stuck told me. "My family has been touched by this, and I want to get as many impaired drivers off the street."

Court records show that the convicted driver, Travis Jacob Coker, who is now 35, never learned his lesson. He was convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol in Cecil County in 2004 and in Harford County in 2005. In both cases, he drove on a revoked license, and he was sentenced to one year in jail in the Cecil County arrest and three years in Harford County.

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