Dr. Drew on marijuana: “It acts like an opiate and causes severe addiction”

By **Joanne Davidson**
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Make no mistake, says addictions specialist Drew Pinsky, marijuana is addictive — and the earlier one starts to use it, the greater the consequences.

“It acts like an opiate and causes severe addiction,” Pinsky said during a Colorado visit this week. “It affects the white matter of the brain, and for kids who start using marijuana when they are 12, or even younger, those bad consequences tend not to reverse.”

Withdrawal, he said, can last at least two weeks and involve severe anxiety, sleeplessness and irritability.

Best known as Dr. Drew and the host of VH1′s now-cancelled “Celebrity Rehab,” Pinsky was in Denver on Thursday to speak at a luncheon benefiting Arapahoe House, a Denver-based nonprofit that has provided substance abuse treatment and mental health services since 1975. It presently serves 15,000 individuals a year.

Pinsky also pointed out that marijuana is the No. 1 drug of use for teen clients at Arapahoe House, and that there has been a **66 percent increase in teen marijuana admissions between 2011 and 2014. In addition, Arapahoe House has seen a 90 percent increase in marijuana as a secondary drug of choice in adult clients from 2008 to 2014.**

And, since marijuana was legalized for recreational use on Jan. 1, the percentage of clients who came to Arapahoe House on a DUI charge who reported marijuana as a drug of choice **jumped from 8 percent to 14.7 percent.**

“I don’t have a horse in the race when it comes to whether states should legalize marijuana,” Pinsky added. “People determine the laws. But I do wish they would pass laws that enhance health, not jeopardize it.”