

INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST FROM THE FALMOUTH PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP



ON THE ROAD IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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Vacations should be fun and informative. With today's technology people on vacation often send their friends and family members pictures of the food they just ate (or are currently eating) and places they are visiting.

My wife and I are visiting the Low Country of South Carolina, a coastal area steeped in tradition, unique foods, and rich in history and culture. In many ways not unlike Cape Cod. And, like other tourists, I am enjoying the beautiful scenery, new culinary experiences (I think I even love grits), learning things that I never knew about American history, and especially the warmth and hospitality of South Carolinians.

However as a pediatrician dedicated to the well-being of children (wherever they live) I always try to get a sense of the health of kids in the places I visit.

Sex Education Out of Date

While reading a Charleston newspaper over a breakfast of biscuits smothered with sausage gravy, I noticed an article about attempts by several women in the South Carolina legislature to change the way sex education is taught in public schools throughout the state. For the past 25 years, sex education must emphasize abstinence before marriage and students are not taught much about birth control or safe sex. Consequently, South Carolina has some of the highest teen pregnancy rates and high school dropout rates in the country. Massachusetts, on the other hand, allows a more liberal approach to sex education in public schools.

Some comparative data between Massachusetts and its southern counterpart is thought provoking. In South Carolina the high school graduation rate is 66% and the teen pregnancy rate (the number of pregnancies per 1000 teens ages 15-19) is 76/1000, one of the worst in the country. In Massachusetts the graduation rate is 83% and the teen pregnancy rate is 42/1000 teens, one of the best in the country. It is hard to draw conclusions from these statistics, but they are compelling.

Underage Drinking

Another interesting thing I noticed while driving in the Low Country and walking around Charleston and other towns, is the constant messaging on billboards and in store windows about underage drinking, notices that I rarely see in Massachusetts. The following content of a poster in a shop in downtown Charleston is a good example of a strong message:

Fake ID's 101

What happens if you use a fake ID?

- Fines & Fees up to \$470.00 and 30 days in jail
- Possible criminal record
- Mandatory Education Program

NOTE TO SELF: DON'T BE AN I.D.IOT!!!!

A great poster, with a strong message.

How Do the States Compare?

As I have written about in this column on several occasions, we have a significant underage drinking problem in our community. So, South Carolina strong and ubiquitous messaging, Massachusetts, not much. Do the states differ in their teen drinking data? I did some research between bites of fried chicken and found some interesting results.

In South Carolina 22.7% of youth ages 12-20 years drank alcohol in the past month compared to 30% in Massachusetts. In South Carolina 13.7% of youth were involved with binge drinking compared to 19.5% in Massachusetts. And, the data for Falmouth youth is worse than the state average.

Does South Carolina's underage drinking campaign make a difference? I don't know. The differences may be based on other factors including state regulations, stricter law enforcement, or religious affiliation. However, I am sure that such a campaign in our northern state could be another tool to help prevent underage drinking.

I've had my fill of she-crab soup and pulled pork and this Yankee (as in Mason-Dixon Line not team affiliation) is heading home and looking forward to some good clam chowder and a lobster!

For more information, visit the partnership's website at: www.falmouthprevention.org.

This article was written by Dr. Bihari, a pediatrician, chairperson of the Falmouth Prevention Partnership Steering Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Community Health Center of Cape Cod.