

Local rabbi urges spiritual fight against substance abuse

Holds conference near Wernersville to discuss addiction-recovery programs

BY **BRUCE R. POSTEN**
READING EAGLE

Talking about what he calls America's addictive society, Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Yosef Lipsker of Reading said many Jews are in an interesting place.

"It's next to Egypt — in denial," he said, making a wordplay on the river, the Nile.

While many Jews, with a wry take on the world, may find humor hard to suppress, they may be even better at minimizing issues related to alcohol or drug addiction, Lipsker said.

His mission Wednesday, in helping to organize the first Conference on Treatment and Recovery for Rabbis at Caron Treatment Center near Wernersville, was to

raise awareness about substance abuse.

Lipsker is founder and director of Chabad Lubavitch of Berks County, 2310 Hampden Blvd., Muhlenberg Township, a worldwide Jewish outreach organization.

He said he wanted those who are healers — in this case rabbis — to know that spirituality plays an important role in recovery, without the shame, repression or denial that often obstructs identifying those with addiction problems.

Fourteen Orthodox Jewish rabbis from as far away as Australia, the Midwest and several major Eastern cities registered to attend the conference.

The rabbis, many of them involved with substance re-



Rabbi Yosef Lipsker, the organizer of Wednesday's Conference on Treatment and Recovery for Rabbis at Caron Treatment Center.

covery centers in their own communities, were on their way to Brooklyn, N.Y., to at-

tend the annual International Conference of Chabad-Lubavich Shluchim this weekend.

The event attracts thousands of Orthodox Jews.

The international conference is designed to network and plan initiatives and strategies for *Shluchim* (Jewish emissaries) to connect with Jews globally.

The all-day Caron conference's purpose was to educate Jewish religious leaders about addiction issues.

The event was financed by a New York City Jewish donor whose son was helped by Caron staff and Lipsker, a certified addictions counselor whose own journey to help Jewish patients as a chaplain at Caron began more than 10 years ago.

Since then, Lipsker and his wife, Chana, have opened their home to weekly Shabbat dinners, providing a nonjudgmental setting for hundreds of addicted patients seeking connection and support.

The daylong conference featured Caron speakers: Mike

Early, chief clinical officer; Dr. Kenneth Thompson, medical director; Mark Schenker, psychologist; the Rev. William J. Hultberg, a Catholic priest and chaplain; and Ann Smith, executive director of Caron's Breakthrough program geared to personal growth and quality of life issues.

"I run a crisis center in Sydney, Australia, and we're finding more people are willing to talk about these problems and get help," said Rabbi Mendel Kastel, chief executive officer of Jewish House. "This has been an opportunity to grow, interact and learn."

"I think that recognizing the importance of spirituality (to overcome addictions) is a growth industry."

"It may not have been stressed in the past for reasons of privacy, shame or not wanting to create a community stigma."

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