

Idaho Falls Post Register, Thursday, Nov. 22, 2007 – by Heather Wells

Idaho's battle against meth

Two Idaho Falls hospitals are contributing to the Idaho Meth Project

Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center and Mountain View Hospital have donated more than \$200,000 to the cause and will educate the public. Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center and Mountain View Hospital understand the dangers of using methamphetamine. They see it in their facilities every day.

But in an effort to change that reality, the Idaho Falls hospitals are joining forces to get a simple message out: Don't even try methamphetamine once. "We want our community to understand meth as a health issue," EIRMC spokeswoman Cindy Smith-Putnam said.

The hospitals decided to take a personal interest in the Idaho Meth Project by donating more than \$200,000 to the cause. But their efforts won't stop there. "We want to do everything we can to help," said Jeff Sayer, president of Mountain View Hospital.

And with Smith-Putnam's help, Sayer said he plans on going around to schools, television stations and other organizations to get the word out about the dangers of the drug.

Currently, Idaho ranks fifth in the nation for meth use. "It's a problem we have right here in our own backyard," Smith-Putnam said. "We see it every day."

And she knows firsthand how deadly the drug can be. It took her brother's life. "He was caught in the grip of this highly addictive drug," Smith-Putnam said. "It's a drug that knows no boundaries."

The Idaho Meth Project is being patterned after one that began in Montana in 2005. In an effort to combat the spiraling use of the drug, newspapers, billboards and television commercials displayed terrible images of young people who had used the drug: teeth falling out, unwanted pregnancies, disease, violence, even death.

Since the advertising campaign began, Montana has gone from fifth worst in the nation for meth use to 39th.

Idaho is hoping for similar results. Megan Ronk, executive director for the Idaho Meth Project, is optimistic that enough money will be raised to launch the newspaper, billboard and airwave advertisements by January.

"We plan to run the program until we've driven the drug out of our state," Ronk said. And Smith-Putnam is excited she's helping with the efforts. "We still have a long way to go," she said. "But together we can make a difference."