

Drug caution urged

By John Macdonald

ICE is not nice but the good news is that there is no epidemic of the synthetic drug.

Sitharthan Thiagarajan said yesterday alcohol and marijuana use overwhelmingly accounted for admissions to Westmead Hospital's addiction treatment centre at North Parramatta.

The professor is a visiting clinical psychologist at the centre and estimated ice users had stayed constant at about 10-14 per cent of admissions.

He said the bad news was that ice – crystal methamphetamine – would be a continuing scourge because it was easy to manufacture and transport and cheap to buy compared with other illegal drugs.

“Cocaine is fairly expensive and gives a rush for 20-30 minutes while ice stays in the system a long time; the effect of smoking ice can last 24 hours,” he said.

Professor Thiagarajan said the epidemic of horror stories about ice could be counter-productive.

“Scare tactics never work, look at cigarettes,” he said. “People need to be educated without scare tactics.”

He said while there were extreme, horrific cases of violence by ice users – a father chopping off his daughter's head in the US being a much-quoted one – and ice's contributing to paranoia and mental illness, there was one common state.

“Users become agitated,” he said.

“We have to increase awareness of the dangers



Not nice: Professor Thiagarajan says ice will be a continuing scourge. **Picture:** Natalie Spiteri

and emphasise early treatment.”

He said there had been a push by parents for more action and research was increasing into psychological effects on personality and the physical component of addiction.

Professor Thiagarajan said ice wasn't new; it had

been discovered in Japan 80 years ago and had initially been used as a therapeutic drug.

“It was thought it helped barbiturate withdrawal and was an appetite suppressant,” he said, but then LSD was once seen as therapeutic.

He said the further dis-

turbing news was that increased chemical knowledge meant more illegal synthetic drugs would be discovered and distributed, regardless of success in combating ice use.

Against that “some ice users make a natural recovery with the help of parents and significant others.”