

Prescribed opiates are easy road to addiction

There are not too many things I'd bet my life on. So, if you told me that "Danny" would some day become addicted to opiates, I'd have bet all I had. Just name an indicator of stability and this 29-year-old had it. Open, honest and direct are just a few.

It all started with an alcohol hangover. The medicine cabinet was open and on the way to the Tylenol, an old prescription sat. Hmm, Percocet was a pain reliever. Just what the doctor ordered. Poof, the pain was not only gone, but it was replaced by euphoria. Whoa, he thought, an instantaneous reversal of fortune. Just once can't hurt.

As life would have it in the universal justice system, the trial was short and the error, well, the magnitude became painfully obvious. He recently described the withdrawal symptoms to me as "having the ache of the worst flu, times twenty", with cramping, vomiting, sweating, etc. You've seen the movies.

The term opiate describes any of the narcotic alkaloids found in opium, as well as any derivatives of such alkaloids. On the street they are super plentiful. Danny almost instantaneously developed a habit of 25 pills daily with a \$900-a-week habit. "It was literally the blink of an eye. I had no clue how quickly one hangover could lead to addiction. These things are as available as candy. What are doctors thinking when they prescribe these things?" As a behavioral health therapist, I called a friend and fellow professional.

Dr. Adam Koelsch is a local psychiatrist, who also treats addictions. In a recent conversation, I asked him why these highly addictive opiates, including Vicodin, Oxycontin and oxycodone, are so readily prescribed.

EAST VALLEY

VOICE 1/31/09
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Tribune



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COMMENTARY

It appears doctor's choices are limited. Alternatives such as Cymbalta and Lyrica have side effects — dizziness, weight gain, insomnia and nausea. Ibuprofen and aspirin over time can irritate the stomach lining, with the possibility of eventual kidney damage.

Subsequent to our conversation, I wondered for nearly a nanosecond why the choices were limited. It was then that the big "duh" hit me. According to Theodore Dalrymple's book, "Romancing Opiates: Pharmacological Lies and The Addiction Bureaucracy," why would time, effort and millions of dollars go into research for non-addictive alternatives, when the aforementioned pain relievers are ... ahem, addictive?

I won't further damage your spiritual well-being with the exceptionally gross profits made maintaining the pharmaceutical status quo. It's in the billions and yes, they're heartless, soulless companies. I also wonder on which planet their children play?

Years ago, I had the distinct pleasure of conversing with actor Paul Newman subsequent to a race at Road America in Wisconsin. His son, Scott, died from drug abuse and his pain was scintillating as we spoke.

Parents, have you heard the term "pharming parties," as in pharmacological? Mexico is a particularly cost-efficient place to purchase these opiates. The kids call them pharming runs.

There's no doubt as to the epidemiological status of opiates in this country. Young adults, please learn to recreate with sanity. Trauma victims, please get help from a professional counselor or therapist; learn to cope appropriately. To all physicians, I ask for your consciousness in regard to opiate addiction. Please prescribe non-addictive meds when at all possible.

As for "Danny", his substance abuse treatment includes medication management from Dr. Koelsch and psychotherapy from this therapist. He realizes how important a support system is, inclusive of 12-step meetings, particularly in the first year of recovery. When asked how he views his addiction, he recites an old mantra: "I'm really sick and tired of being sick and tired." Opiates are indeed a deadly game of Russian roulette with a loaded revolver in addiction's revolving door.

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