

Opioid Drug Epidemic

The Opioid Drug Epidemic has affected my life both personally and professionally. To start I have a brother who is a heroin addict, who is currently in prison. My brother was a starting lineman on offense and defense for his high school football team and had the potential to play college football. That all changed before his senior year, when he got into drugs. Since then my brother has been in and out of rehab and jail. I had taken him in several times to live with me but it always ended the same way with him stealing from me and back on drugs. My brother has stolen from everybody in my family and others. Two years ago, he had a son and I thought maybe that would turn him around, but I was wrong. Since the birth of his son, he has not spent a single Christmas with him because he has been in jail. Before this current incarceration I received a phone call in the middle of the night that my brother had overdosed and was being taken to the hospital. He did this in front of his 1 year old son. The sad part is my whole family knew we would eventually get this phone call and there was nothing any of us could do about it. We had tried to help him but it came to the point where we had to stop. We were no longer helping him but ENABLING him. (My family does make sure my nephew is safe and taken care of). My Brother is currently serving 3-5 years in state correction for breaking and entering, theft, and manufacturing and distribution of a controlled substance. I believe once he gets released from prison that within 2 years he will either be back in jail or dead.

Professionally this epidemic has caused me many mixed emotions. The hardest part for me is dealing with the families of the addicts. Like myself, they did not choose to have an addict as a family member. One of the toughest moments in my career was when I had to tell a father, who I have known for a very long time, "I am so sorry but I have done everything I possibly can but he is dead". We were dispatched to a cardiac arrest and I knew the area we were going but the driveway was not marked. Because of history I asked dispatch if this was the residence and they confirmed. The grandfather met us at the porch and we went inside. We had to pull the pt from behind the front door and we continued the resuscitation efforts that this younger brother had started. After 20 minutes of resuscitation efforts Medical Command gave orders to quit. I learned from the family that the day before his mother was in a car accident and was flown to a Pittsburgh hospital, this was also the same day that he was released from a stay in REHAB. I have known this family most of my life and remember when these kids were born, and I was faced with telling the dad his son was dead while his wife is almost 2 hours away in a hospital due to the car accident.

There have been people that I have brought back from near death with Naloxone and others whose condition could not be reversed. I feel the problem with use of Naloxone by the general public is the lack of education. I do not believe that the general public understands everything that can come with its administration. I have had to give more than one dose to get people to breathe on their own and people wake from the overdose extremely violent. The general public does not understand that even though Naloxone is given and the person wakes up that medication will wear off.

As for a better solution to this epidemic I am not quite sure. I do not believe that prison is a suitable solution to drug use and distribution. It has been proven over the years that we can not stop the drugs from coming in. Even if we curbe the supply of

theses drug demand goes up increasing other crimes like theft and robbery, to pay for the now more expensive drug. I have learned that a lot of addicts also have some type of mental/ behavioral issues such as depression and bipolar and use for self medicating. An increase for mental/ behavioral health care may be one of the ways to help curve this epidemic. Also looking into this subject another problem expressed is that there is a lack of Rehab facilities and lack of funding for the ones that exists. Many of the addicts are of lower socioecominc status and can not afford to go to rehab facilities. If they are fortune enough to go to a rehab facility they ended up coming back to the same environment and end up relapsing. If society truly wants to help this population we can not just set people up for failure. After services are need to get this population employed and out of this environment so that they can succeed.

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