

Heroin Addiction: A Local Mother's Story

In recent weeks, I have been exploring heroin addiction in our area. How it happens to so many of our young people is not quite by accident, but certainly not intentional.

Typically, they start by abusing prescription painkillers. ("They're not so bad," the fatal thinking goes. "These pills are, after all, medicine.") That's a slope so slippery and steep that in the blink of an eye, "good kids" can hit bottom with heroin.

When they do, their families typically discover that commercial health insurance (which is what most of us have), doesn't cover a cure. That is, while addiction is a disease, it is treated like something far less important and definitely not urgent.

But don't take it from me. Take it from one of your neighbors. This local woman (who requested that her name not be used) asked me to share her experience, both to underscore the problems of heroin and health insurance, and to prove that it happens here and can happen to any family. Here's her story:

My husband and I faced a situation with our 23-year-old son five years ago. We learned that he was using heroin, and by then he was back at college. We left at 4 a.m. one September morning



FROM
THE EDITOR

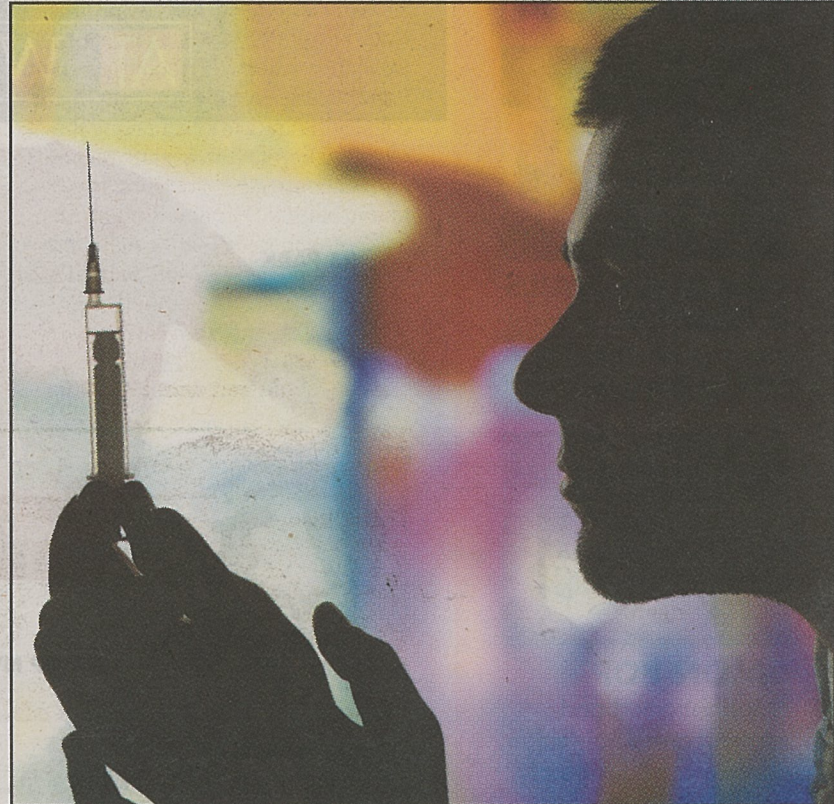
JOHN
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to go to his college upstate and "rescue" him...from himself.

During the long drive, I was able to spend many hours on the phone with our insurance company. We were shocked to learn that we would not be covered for any of his inpatient treatment. Drug addiction is an illness, not a crime, although it can lead to criminal actions.

*When we arrived at our son's house upstate, and we discovered the needle evidence, he was shocked to see us, but the first thing he said, after "Oh f***!", was "I can't do this anymore." He had just come back from trying to sell his Xbox to get more cash for drugs.*

He left college willingly, and the next day, after taking him to a very respectable counselor who evaluated



him, we put him on a plane that same day to COPAC, a treatment center in Jackson, Miss. It was the hardest day of our lives. We borrowed and borrowed and have finally paid off the \$50,000 it took to pay for his care. Care well worth it, as he has now celebrated three and a half years of sobriety, and is about to become engaged.

Too many parents do not have the means to pay for or can borrow for this care. And I have often compared addiction to diabetes. Both illnesses depend on the cooperation of the patient. But one doesn't get angry with a diabetic, or ostracize them the way one will a drug addict.

From medicine-cabinet pills to injecting heroin is a remarkably short path.

We are losing too many of our children to this epidemic.

Thank you for writing so carefully and factually about the importance of being able to obtain insurance.

God bless you, and God bless AA [Alcoholics Anonymous].

If any other parents, treatment professionals or recovering addicts would like to share their stories, please send them to me.

John Owens is editor in chief of Anton Community Newspapers. Email: jowens@antonnews.com



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