

## The Opioid Epidemic: *The need for more outreach programs for young adult addicts*

BY DANA MURPHY

IT IS NO SECRET NOW that opioid addiction in the United States has become not only a public health crisis, but an epidemic. Every single day, nearly 130 people die from an opioid overdose in the U.S. alone. Not more than just twenty years ago were pharmaceutical companies successfully reassured the public that patients who were prescribed opioids were not at risk of becoming addicted to them. This led to doctors prescribing them at greater rates, and ultimately led to the U.S. discovering that these once convincing pharmaceutical companies were wrong.

In 2015, 33,000 Americans died of an opioid overdose; more than half of those were young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. Furthermore, from 2016 to 2017, the Midwest experienced a seventy percent increase in opioid overdoses. In September 2018, just four months ago, my own best friend who had moved to Minnesota from California in 2015 died from an overdose. She was not an opioid user when I met her. In fact, she was outgoing and loved life more than anyone I know. Her problem developed in the few years she lived in Minnesota and led to a quick spiral into heavy drug use. She was only twenty-two years old.

So the questions remain: What do we plan on doing about the opioid epidemic moving forward? And how many more increases in death rates do we need to see before serious and significant action is taken? Although I have always been aware of the issue, the premature and unexpected death of my friend has opened my eyes to not only how serious, but also how close to home, the problem is.

It cannot go unacknowledged that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as well as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have taken several steps in order to treat and hopefully end the opioid addiction crisis. They have both worked to improve access to recovery services, strengthen our understanding of the problem, establish safe and non-addictive strategies to manage chronic pain, and come up with new medications and technologies to treat addiction (especially opioid use) disorders. These are great and comforting steps being taken, but these things obviously don't happen overnight. So where does that leave those addicted to opioids in the meantime and how can we help?

Often times I hear about addicts in their twenties being put through the criminal justice system when they are charged with a crime related to opioids. It's upsetting because with the easy access to opioids these days, their arrests and charges just become a cycle for them that they unfortunately are unlikely to break. Being fined and/or sent to jail rarely solves the actual problem at hand. Instead, their problem with drugs should be treated for what it is: a disease. Rather than be punished, there should be resources set in place for young addicts to turn to upon getting in trouble with drugs. Doing this would establish a foundation for addicts that would help them to overcome the devastating obstacle of opioid addiction and ultimately end the cycle of arrests and charges. So many addicts I have met simply need someone to turn to and understand them. Although my friend was never charged with any drug-related crimes, just knowing there were better and more resources she could reach out to might have saved her life.

Being two years into my own recovery, I can say with confidence that there are simply not enough resources for young people trying to gain sobriety. Having attended many Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings in the past, I was almost always the sole attendee under the age of fifty. I no longer attend meetings as I felt like I could not relate to the other members. Of the four colleges I have attended, only one of them offers a very loose outreach program for students and young people in recovery. Universities should make recovery support groups a staple on their campuses without question. Especially considering the popularity of drugs and alcohol on college campuses and in college towns, this would be a great and innovative way to introduce people to the option of sobriety early on.

Communities and college towns should offer AA and NA meetings specifically geared towards young adults. For those trying to stop using drugs, especially those in their 20s, having people to talk to and actually *relate* to is one of the key elements to a successful recovery. †

## The Government Shutdown

BY MATTHEW IUNG

THE LAST GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN was not only our longest, but the one that probably affected the most people, and the consequences are not just a financial. After missing two paychecks, there is no doubt that many families suffered while having to scrape by to stay afloat. For many of them, the trying times are not over. With there already being threats of another shutdown, I believe that the longest lasting effect of Trump's decision will be anxiety and fear, a fear that this will not be the last shutdown to take both time and money from workers, and fear that it will be even longer the second time around.

There is a real possibility that the government will shut down again. This is a terrifying prospect for families around the country. It's likely that people are being tight with their money just in case their pay is withheld from them again. This is no way to treat a people that elected you, regardless of your party affiliation or stance on an issue. To let this much anxiety and distress take hold of the people you are representing at any level is absolutely intolerable. Aren't the workers you are withholding pay from working for the same government as the people who cannot seem to agree?

The shutdown will have irreversible effects on people all over the country. During the last one, some were late on bills, credit card payments, and the rent payment that keeps a roof over their head. This not only affects the people, but often, the institutions around them. While it's good that there are ways for those workers to get paid, that doesn't make up for what could have been, or what was lost to them. While the country waits to see whether what solution is created by lawmakers, we can only hope that if the government does shut down, it won't be for as long. †

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