

Addiction and Recovery: A Primer

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If you are reading this, then probably you or someone close to you suffers from the illness of addiction. You may have been referred to Pain Recovery Solutions by your doctor, a friend in recovery, or from the internet. However you got here, you're probably "sick and tired of being sick and tired". If so, we can help.

The disease of addiction may start off gradually, but eventually it will affect every aspect of your life: family, friends, jobs, and money, health will all suffer. You may feel hopeless and alone. Recovery is now possible provided you are willing to follow a simple treatment program.

This primer represents a blueprint designed to build a new life or, if you will, a plan for living free of chemical bondage. We at PRS are here to help you begin your recovery.

What is Addiction?

Once upon a time (before 1980), drug addiction was thought to be a moral problem – the use of illegal drugs by criminals to "get high" and escape from life. Treatment was virtually nonexistent, and consisted of inner city methadone clinics and strict-discipline "therapeutic communities". Recovery was rare.

We now know, and scientific evidence supports the fact that addiction is a chronic illness, much like diabetes or high blood pressure. People from all walks of life become addicted, often to prescription drugs. The disease of addiction centers in the brain and the mind, affecting both. It is manifested by loss of control over drug use, craving (an overwhelming urge to use), withdrawal symptoms, and compulsive use of drugs despite harmful, dangerous and life threatening consequences. Addicts are caught in a downward spiral of mental obsession and physical dependence they cannot control with their own "will power". Most want to quit but cannot. Many addicts believe they are hopeless.

Recovery from addiction is now accepted as routine and commonplace. You may know someone in recovery. In 2006, Addiction is treated like any other medical problem.

What are Opioids?

Opioids are drugs that are either derived directly from opium, such as morphine and codeine, or are synthetically produced painkillers such as Vicodin, Methadone, Norco, Oxycontin, and Dilaudid.

Opioids have long been used to treat acute pain or cancer-related pain, and occasionally opioids are prescribed for certain chronic non-cancer types of pain as well. They can also be highly addictive substances, and the threat of abuse can become a real concern for patients who need these drugs to manage pain. Many patients with the disease of addiction started using prescription opioids after an injury, or dental procedure.

How Common is Opioid Addiction?

Opioid addiction is more common than you may think. Opioid dependence is not predictable—it is a reaction that occurs in people who, for reasons that are not completely understood, are biologically and psychosocially vulnerable. About 10 percent of the general population is thought to be susceptible to addiction.

Men and women of all ages, races, ethnic groups and educational levels can become dependent on opioids. It's a lot like having an allergy to a drug. Some people have it, and others don't. Nobody chooses to become addicted.

The overall death rate in opioid addiction is estimated to be 20 times that of the age matched general population. Most deaths are due to overdose, infection, suicide, and accidents.

Why do Some People Get Addicted and Others Don't?

Exactly why some people, and not others, become dependent on opioids (or any addictive substance) is not totally understood. Most people who take opioids do not become opioid-dependent. However, certain factors appear to increase the possibility of addiction, including:

- Other addictions, nicotine (smoking) for example
- A history of trauma and abuse in childhood
- Properties of the drug itself (e.g., how quickly it creates a "high," how long the effects of the drug last)
- Genetic factors that influence drug metabolism
- Genetic factors contributing to the risk of addiction (i.e., a family history of alcoholism)
- Lastly, substance abuse, which can lead to addiction, is often highly influenced by societal norms and peer pressure.

Our Program

At Pain Recovery Solutions, we treat men and women with the illness of addiction.

Recovery is an ongoing, lifelong process. Once a person has stopped using a particular substance, the process of learning to live without that substance

begins. Learning to manage life's daily stresses and developing strategies to deal with the challenges that arise are important skills to develop in maintaining recovery and preventing relapse.

Many people also feel that finding ways to be of service can be very helpful in keeping one's recovery on track.

Many practical matters may also become important. People in recovery often face a variety of barriers that challenge their ability to move forward productively with their lives and to maintain their recovery. These include issues such as finding appropriate housing, finding a job, continuing one's education, getting medical insurance, and problems with discrimination.

A person in the PRS Addiction Treatment Program receives professional help in working toward recovery. Our process involves entire abstinence from brain altering drugs, and a practical behavior change program designed to redirect brain activity away from drug use, toward a healthy life.

We have compiled a therapeutic program with multiple components to start your recovery. These include: evaluation, intervention services, recovery programs, mental health practitioners, detoxification, and aftercare. Medications are used as a part of a professionally directed drug and alcohol treatment program in conjunction with a support system such as a 12-step program and psychodynamic group therapy designed to reduce cravings for drugs.

There are many stages during the recovery process, which can begin with identifying an addiction problem and learning about the various treatment options available.

Getting Started

If you have decided you need help with an addiction problem, then you have already taken the "first step" in the recovery process. This might be the most difficult step of all. You might want to look at your recovery as a journey - away from a life of loneliness, self-deception and pain, toward a new freedom and a newfound sense of belonging.

The illness of addiction affects people in unique ways. There are physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual symptoms that must be addressed in order for recovery to occur.

At PRS, we take a "whole person" approach to addiction treatment. Our professional staff is specifically trained in Addiction Medicine and provides a safe, confidential, comfortable beginning for your recovery. Addiction can be complicated by other medical and psychiatric conditions, and therefore a thorough assessment and detailed treatment plan is essential.

Our PRS Addiction Treatment Program includes the following components:

STAGE I

Assessment

This is the initial phase of treatment during which you will be seen by PRS professional staff to identify the type and severity of your addiction, as well as other complicating factors that might influence your recovery. A full medical history and physical examination including laboratory testing identifies other conditions needing attention. We work with your primary care doctor to coordinate your healthcare. If you do not have a personal physician, we will provide primary care treatment while you undergo treatment.

Many individuals with addiction suffer from psychiatric illness as well. We offer psychiatric assessment and stabilization as part of our initial evaluation services. We work with your psychiatrist to identify mental health barriers to successful recovery.

Detoxification

The pain, anxiety, and misery associated with drug withdrawal can be overwhelming. It's a real barrier to successful recovery. At PRS, we provide safe, compassionate, comfortable medically supervised detoxification from opioids.

BUPRENORPHINE (Suboxone, Subutex) was approved by the FDA on October 9, 2002 as a new treatment for heroin and other opioid addictions. It is the first opioid drug approved for addictions that can be prescribed by physicians in their offices. It is related to morphine but does not produce a high, dependence, or withdrawal syndrome. It has major advantages compared to methadone. As part of our comprehensive addiction treatment program, buprenorphine rapidly ends craving, withdrawal symptoms, and allows patients to quickly move forward in their recovery.

We initiate buprenorphine treatment in our office and closely monitor your detoxification with follow up phone calls and office visits. Patients often report "feeling normal" again within hours of treatment; many feel in control of their lives for the first time in years.

Buprenorphine Therapy

Unfortunately, many people with addictive illness believe that detoxification is equivalent to recovery. **This is most definitely not the case.**

Detoxification only treats the physical craving and other withdrawal symptoms. The illness of addiction causes profound changes in brain chemistry, some of which may be permanent. It is these chronic changes that are responsible for relapse into active addiction. Maintenance therapy with Buprenorphine allows the brain to begin healing from the effects of chronic drug use. Craving is eliminated as a potential relapse trigger. Then, a program of behavior change redirects brain reward circuits away from use of the chemical, toward healthy tools for living. Eventually, maintenance therapy can be discontinued, and the behavior change program provides a daily program for growth in recovery.

Psychotherapeutic Support

For some patients, psychiatric evaluation and ongoing psychotherapeutic support is warranted. Our treating psychotherapy staff offers the needed intervention to support patients in developing healthy coping skills in areas such as affect regulation, the development of relationships and crisis management. With assistance, patients develop hope for the future and identify resources. Treatment will address relapse prevention, urge management, alternative coping skills and symptom management.

12 Step Programs

The single most important factor predicting long-term recovery from an addictive illness is frequent attendance at 12 step meetings (Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, "AA and NA"). These groups have helped millions of people suffering from the illness of addiction to achieve abstinence from drugs and alcohol and to become happily and usefully whole. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using and drinking. These groups are free of charge, widely available, and require no personal disclosure. At PRS, we strongly believe in 12-step recovery, and encourage daily attendance at meetings, particularly in the early stages of your recovery.

We will direct you to specific meetings in your area. Almost all who attend meetings report feeling better after each meeting. We know there is more to 12-step recovery than just attending meetings. At PRS, we are familiar with recovery literature, and provide this to those new to AA and NA. We will support your recovery through regular discussions about your 12-step attendance and engagement in the 12-step program of recovery.

STAGE II

After detoxification, and initial sobriety, what comes next? In truth, the journey has just begun.

Recovery consists of multiple daily actions, 'baby steps' if you will, that bring about gradual changes in our reaction to life, and improved relations with those around us. We are promised that "our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change" if we are painstaking about this phase of our development. In order to guide you on this journey, we continue our follow up care and monitor your recovery. Our aftercare program consists of the following:

Ongoing support

You will meet regularly with our professional staff to review current health status, medications and status in recovery. Psychological functioning, family support, employment and 12 Step attendance are discussed at each visit. Maintenance medications are prescribed, when indicated. "Non-chemical coping" is emphasized as a symptom of successful recovery. Ongoing use of nicotine (if present) is addressed at each visit. **We believe emphatically that early nicotine cessation leads to better, healthier recovery from the illness of addiction.**

Benefits

The illness of addiction causes pain, suffering, loss of relationships, dignity, and self respect. It is a physical illness with mental and spiritual dimensions. It is ultimately fatal if untreated. Our PRS recovery program addresses all aspects of your illness. With medical treatment, the symptoms of withdrawal are stabilized; other medical problems are identified and managed. Psychological stress improves with 12-step recovery and group therapy. Psychiatric consultation is readily available, and we believe in treating your psychiatric illness while you are recovering from addiction. The spiritual dimension of recovery is emphasized. Recovery is a growth process, and a journey. The PRS program encourages spiritual development as a path to wholeness, usefulness, and well being.

Addiction is just like other chronic medical illness such as asthma, high blood pressure, or diabetes. There is no reliable cure for these conditions, but successful daily management allows patients to live full happy lives. Our professional staff is here to support your recovery right from the beginning. We are with you through your initial treatment, and will follow your long-term recovery. Having this type of team behind you makes all the difference.