

The Ice Breaker

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We do not believe
if we do not live and work
according to our belief.

—Heidi Wills

PRESCRIPTION FOR TRAGEDY: Addiction to Pain medication

The medical establishment's view on physical pain has changed over the last 50 years. In the past, pain was considered an integral aspect of either healing or dying; it could be alleviated, but rarely eliminated. As more research has been done, understanding of pain management has come to the forefront of patient care.

It boils down to this: Pain hurts, and human beings don't like it. In most cases, relief of severe pain can lead to dramatic results in a patient's quality of life, productivity, and even their prognosis. What could possibly be the downside to helping patients live pain-free lives? Many physicians wrestle with that question every day. Below are the things that must be considered.

The medications. It should be noted that narcotic agents do not actually deaden the pain, but work to *dissociate* patients from the pain. Commonly used narcotics, listed in ascending order of potency (strength) include:

- codeine (e.g. Tylenol #3)
- propoxyphene (e.g. Darvocet)
- hydrocodone (e.g. Vicodin)
- oxycodone (e.g. Percocet, Oxycontin)

Hydrocodone—a mix of synthetic codeine and acetaminophen—is the most abused prescription drug in the United States, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. It is known as Vicodin, Percocet, Lortab or Lorcet. Its effective duration of analgesic action is 3 to 4 hours. As with all pure opioid agonists, there is no 'ceiling effect' to the analgesia, so patients can continue to increase their dosages indefinitely as tolerance builds and maintain analgesic effect. As a general rule, these medications should be used for no more than two weeks to avoid dependency.

Oxycodone differs from Hydrocodone in that in that the hydroxyl group of codeine has been oxidized to a carbonyl group, in other words, binding oxygen to the codeine. It is marketed in combination with aspirin (Percodan, Endodan, Roxiprin) or paracetamol/acetaminophen (Percocet, Endocet, Roxicet, Tylox) for the relief of pain. More recently, ibuprofen has been added to oxycodone (Combunox). It is also sold in a sustained-release form by Purdue Pharma under the trade name OxyContin (the name is actually short for *Oxycodone Continuous release*).

OxyContin is well known to the general public, due to news reports of crimes associated with it. Due to acts such as pharmacy diversion and "doctor shopping", the drug is widely available to those without a prescription. The increased misuse of the drug has led to a higher number of emergency department mentions and deaths associated with oxycodone. Between 1994 and 2001, there was a reported 352% increase in ER visits related to all forms of oxycodone usage.

Abuse and addiction. Painkillers such as OxyContin, Vicodin, and Percocet are miracle drugs to people who suffer from severe or chronic pain, but the potential for abuse and addiction cannot be overstated. While the literature that accompanies a prescription for these medications clearly states the dangers of abuse, many people don't believe

that it could happen to them. Celebrities such as Rush Limbaugh, Brett Favre, Matthew Perry, and Courtney Love can attest to the dangers of these medications; they were all addicted to prescription painkillers. Luckily for them, they were able to get their lives back after treatment for addiction: Rush Limbaugh is still on the radio, Brett Favre is breaking football records in his 16th season with the Green Bay Packers, Matthew Perry is still making movies, and Courtney Love is . . . well, still Courtney Love.

People can be ingenious when it comes to finding new ways to catch a buzz, so it shouldn't be surprising that someone discovered that OxyContin, when crushed and snorted, made them higher faster than when the pills were ingested (remember, the drug is formulated for controlled release). Soon, news reports appeared about addicts seeking OxyContin by any means necessary, and in some cases, this included violent and deadly acts.

The law. These medications are considered schedule II controlled substances, which means there must be a written prescription which cannot have refills, nor can it be called in to a pharmacy by a physician. The Drug Enforcement Agency has declared war on physicians who appear to be overprescribing or prescribing indiscriminately, and in a number of cases, physicians have lost their licenses.

The pharmaceutical companies themselves must also take some blame for the increase in dependence on these drugs. The Purdue Frederick Company, Inc., admitted that Purdue fraudulently marketed OxyContin by falsely claiming that OxyContin was less addictive, less subject to abuse, and less likely to cause withdrawal symptoms than other pain medications when there was no medical research to support these claims and without Food and Drug Administration approval of these claims.

On May 10, 2007, the Stamford, Connecticut-based company pleaded guilty to felony charges that they purposely misbranded the painkiller OxyContin with intent to mislead and defraud. Purdue and three executives will pay a total of \$634,515,475.

It is difficult to assess another person's pain. People have varying degrees of pain tolerance and what may be unbearable for one person could be mildly uncomfortable for another. What doctors are up against is the question of trust: is the patient telling the truth about their pain or just trying to get the drug?

Physicians are taught the ancient aphorism, "First, do no harm." In prescribing opiates, they must walk a narrow path to follow that advice.

Interestingly, as I was doing research for this article, I clicked on a link for OxyContin that diverted me to a DEA page warning about the dangers of opiate abuse and the inadvisability of ordering such drugs from pharmacies abroad. I half expected to find DEA agents swarming around the house at any minute. The message is clear: zero tolerance for abuse of painkillers, no matter where they are bought.

Editor

NOTE: An overdose of acetaminophen can cause serious harm. The maximum amount of acetaminophen for adults is 1 gram (1000 mg) per dose and 4 grams (4000 mg) per day. Taking more acetaminophen could cause damage to the liver. One Vicodin tablet may contain up to 750 mg of acetaminophen.

For safety, if a medication contains 650 mg of acetaminophen or more per tablet, no more than 5 tablets should be taken in 24 hours; for those containing 500 mg or less of acetaminophen, no more than 8 tablets should be taken in 24 hours.

NOTE: Addicts in recovery must tell their physician that they cannot be prescribed the drugs described in this article. Some physicians fail to realize the danger in prescribing opiates to an alcoholic or drug addict, even if their drug of choice was not an opiate. Doctors are trained to relieve patient's pain and promote healing, which is where their first priority lies; it is up to the patient to be honest and forthright with their physician about the potential for abuse and dependence.

Voices from the Butterfly House

Hi, I'm Elsie and I'm an addict . . . and I'm still here! This month I was asked to write about my plans for after I leave the Butterfly House. I have more interesting things to write about, but I'll talk about them in a minute. When I leave here November 1st, I'm renting out a house with a friend, I won't say where, because a lot of people I know, I probably don't want to know where I will live, for my sake.

I would like to go to school. For what? I haven't figured that out yet . . . Counselor, therapist, or maybe starting out with something fun, like writing classes! I found out there is a lovely lady who is involved in my life (who has a lot of power over my every move) that will help me with school funding. So that's nice! Maybe I'll go to school to be a P.O.!!! LOL!

When I do leave here, I plan to continue in my recovery, including picking up that 300 lb. phone and calling my sponsor (great lady) and continuing my meetings . . . I love my meetings! I'd also like to come back here when the "house mother" goes to work and stay with the girls. My favorite meeting is Wednesday nights at the Alano at 8 p.m. LOVE IT!!! When I go to meetings, it's like getting all that s*** built up inside, off your chest! There are 2 people at the Wednesday night meeting that know pretty much, oh yeah, the whole aspect of my life. We just have fun and listen and take in what we say, and through the next week, it's like we have been reborn into a change of life or thinking, just because I got comfortable with these people and listened to them.

I'd like to give a quick thanks—thank you to Lucas, my ex of 4 1/2 years and my brother's best friend, thank you for loving me and my brother and not giving up on me; to Larry, (ex of 2 years) THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME GO! To Luke, my friend, who always answers the phone for me (!) to hear my funny stories or my pity stories; he always, always answers! Thanks to Doreen for this wonderful home, this house was at first, in my eyes, a road block, but as Doreen gave me courage and comfort, it became healing and learning. I mean she must care a lot to have started M.A.D.A.M. and the "Butterfly House". Come on, for real, who would just wake up one day and say "I want to have a sober transition home for gals out there who need help . . ." and actually do it! Thanks to my absolutely wonderful mother Donna—for no matter what the hell "us kids" did or are doing—always being there . . . Literally through thick and thin. Thanks to my father for being my daddy and not forgetting me!! To my sister Credence and brother-in-law for forgiving me and making my future nephew/Godson DRB!!! . . . and to all you girls who used to live here and decided to talk s*** about me and use me for a reason that you left . . . Thank you for making the center of your thoughts and your lives!! . . . Oh yeah, and Adam—thank you for giving me hope and strength and making me smile. You might not know that you gave me hope and strength, but you did. You'll probably never read this anyway, so really I could sit here and talk s*** about you and how jealous of you I am . . . Ha ha ha, just kiddin'. By the way, for those of you who don't know Adam, I met him on a bench downtown St. Croix Falls; he was only waiting for a pizza listening to his music. But he's a super cool guy! (Inside joke!)

Thank you to my friends Carl and Josh, you two are the kind of characters I need in my life, every time I hear from you or step outside to wave at you, or when you go for walks with me to enjoy the overlook and smoke a cig with me for my brother (even though neither of you smoke) it brightens my life a little bit more, you make me smile, especially when you act out movies or when you talk about work!!! Thank you to Blake, you will probably never read this either but you're an inspiration to me! A huge one, I envy you! To push forward to do something you love as a career is sweet!!!

I want to give a huge thanks to Ricki . . . my Ricki . . . As he sits in jail, not a day goes by that I don't think about him . . . Brady too, well I don't think about him every day, but a lot. Ricki, your strengths and weaknesses are always unsure while you're locked up but your courage is what you need to keep when you get out (and to all in jail) don't lose hope. Keep your head up buddy, I know it's great knowing your family is there for support, but it's nice knowing someone outside your family really cares too. That's how it was for me—I love ya buddy, and don't forget it can always get worse before it gets better! So let's hope this was part of the "worst"! You can do this (anyone can) . . . beat addiction, or fight it daily, but the *first thing you need is to want it.*

~so here we all go, us addicts and alcoholics joining and running the path of wild abandoned . . . realizing slowly that when you can stop, you don't want to, it's when you want to . . . you can't!!!

Do you have any idea how hard it is trying to find something you've been running from your whole life? In the past, what I wanted deeply and what I used to be were 2 different things. What I want today—I'm doing—I'm actually wanting positive things in my life and I want this bad enough—I'm achieving!

Bravery: "To be brave is to do the right thing, even if you know it's going to hurt."

Alright, I don't know if it's working, but what I want to do is give people HOPE! I've been realizing that you don't make a point by being mean to someone and you don't "win" by being mad. You may get "your way" but inside you "lose."

As you may be able to see, I'm still grieving for my brother and his actions toward death. I don't wish hurt upon anyone. I used to be mean, but I wish pain on no one . . . any kind of it. Once you lose someone so close to you from suicide, your world changes . . . Your whole damn world, your point of view, your ways and actions, your feelings, the way you see things, the way you hear things, the respect you have, the concern, the care, the love that becomes unconditional. Is everything a coincidence or is it fate . . . the way things begin to happen . . . is it supposed to be a lesson? Or a slap in the face? *Your whole world just changes!*

As I have experienced, and as I go through changes of my life, I notice little things more often now, beautiful things that have been created, my mother is my favorite creation (he he he), I love her. That magnificent woman has a keen eye for beauty. She is constructing (I like to call it that because of Martin) a patio by our house for Martin (my bother, her only son) which involves lots of labor, time, money, and appreciation! Most important, it takes unconditional love . . . that's just one of her projects. This is her way of healing. Sitting outside working her @\$ off on Marty's patio.

A friend of my brother's, now a friend of my mother's is over there all the time: Mike, helping,

laboring and healing. Keeping my mom company, Mike says Marty's a light in the shoreline. I like that . . . A light in the shoreline! That right there is beauty!

Anyway, moving right along, with healing and recovery, there's 4 things I see recovery as: 1-wanting it, 2-acceptance, 3-courage, 4-wisdom. BE BRAVE, don't give up, especially don't give up if you're locked up, jail is not a fun place, I know this, I *have* been there myself, as a lot who read this know because you're sittin' in there, everyone makes mistakes and if it's not too late you can change your future, even when you feel it's too late you change your life, because it's never too late, (I wish I could have told my brother that before he left) it might not always be wonderful but it can be better! Sooner or later you won't be watching over your shoulder, you won't get nervous when you see a cop, you won't look back when one passes you on the road, ha ha, sooner or later your fear of failure will leave you, happiness will come to you, peace will surround you, then when you're ready you can tell your story to someone, whether it be a friend, or a group of people or if you write it in a newsletter for viewers to read. The promises . . . being fulfilled, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will come true, as messed up as it sounds.

So as I have said before, write to me if you would like to: P.O. Box 172, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024. Thank you so much to those who read my articles, monthly reading them or just picked up the *Ice Breaker* one time and read one of my articles, thank you, it means a lot to me!

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Hi, my name is Rebecca. I am 22 years old and addicted to meth. I live at the Butterfly House and have been clean for 6 months. I have 2 beautiful daughters who are 6 and 18 months. I recently moved to the Butterfly House on 9/10/07 after my release from county jail. I am still getting settled into the house and learning all the rules. So far, I really enjoy living here and working with the other ladies in the house.

While I was in jail, there were a few ladies with me who had been revoked while at the Butterfly House. I heard terrible things about the house and was very scared to come here, but once I got here, I found out it wasn't as bad as people made it sound. What it comes down to is that the ladies who were here before and now in jail were not ready for sobriety or to follow everyday rules. They wanted to do what they wanted to do and when they wanted to do it.

But back to me . . . My sobriety is my #1 priority today! I need to continue to be sober for myself first and then for my kids. I truly enjoy life now that I'm sober. I attend a recovery meeting every day and after every meeting I feel twice as good about myself and my sobriety. I enjoy the people at the meetings and the information we share with one another.

I secured full-time employment within the first 36 hours of being out of jail, and I never thought I would be able to find a job with my past employment and criminal record. There are a few things I want to share and then I will be done.

I was told by my wonderful social worker that "if you continue to do what you did, you will continue to get what you got." And if you want sobriety, you will do whatever it takes to get it. I hope by others reading this they will think twice before taking the next hit or drink. I have been fighting this addiction for going on 6 years. If I can do it, so can you.

Harley's Corner: The House Cat's perspective on life in the Butterfly House

My name is Harley and I'm the cat at the Butterfly House. I had no idea what I was getting into when I first came here, but now that I'm in charge, I find that I mostly enjoy my job and the people I work with.

I wasn't sure of my duties when I got here, and golly, this place is big! In the beginning, I just found places to hide and stayed out of sight. They showed me my food and my litter box, and I guess that's all I needed to know right then. Slowly, I began venturing out to explore the place, and I got more comfortable here. I discovered that when I came out of hiding, people would pet me and say nice things, so it made me a little less afraid to be seen.

This house has lots and lots of windows, and there is so much to see out in the yard! We have many squirrels living around here, and they take over the yard when there's food in the bird feeders. Of course, the birds are hungry, too, so they swoop in and dive at the squirrels. (I've learned that if I ever get out there, I'm not going to mess with the blue jays—yikes! Talk about loud squawking and pointy beaks!)

I have gotten out there a few times, but honestly, I'm kind of afraid to venture much farther than the bushes by the back door! I like nibbling at the grass a little, and I love how much of a fuss my people make when I sneak out! They're on to me, though, so they watch for me at the doors when they come in and go out. I don't have any front claws, so they think I wouldn't be able to defend myself if I went out there—I sometimes think that my people are kind of dumb.

I have a couple of duties here that I take very, very seriously. The upstairs of the house is my main territory, and I run it like a top cat should. No one gets up or down the stairs without me knowing about it—I sit right on the landing and give everyone a good stare. If they want to pet me, that's o.k., but sometimes I won't even put up with that. I'm a watchcat—it's my job!

My other important job is to see that everyone who needs some purring time gets it. I snuggle up to be petted and I purr like crazy; it seems to make them feel better when they're down, and I have to admit, I like the petting and scratching.

They say I've been naughty a couple of times, but jeepers, I was just acting like a cat! One time I got locked in the office overnight, and I really had to pee, so I went in the shredded paper box, and also in a box of envelopes. Boy, were they upset! For

goodness' sake, at least I didn't go on the carpet!

Another "little mistake" my ladies discovered recently was my nest-building ability. What can I say, I like to be cozy, and sometimes I just need a little hideaway . . . So I burrowed a few holes under a couple of box springs upstairs. Now, you've got to keep in mind that I don't have any front claws, so making a hole in the bottom of a box spring is no small feat (hey, small feet! I made a pun!) and it certainly demonstrates my determination! Ah, well, that was all lost on my girls; they said it was naughty and I'm not allowed to do it again!

The other day, I found a really cool thing in the garbage. It smelled of fish, and it was such fun to take apart that I dragged it around the kitchen with me. It left kind of a mess, and I know I should be tidier, but I was having such a good time, and it smelled so wonderful! I heard them talking about it later, the fishy smell was because it was the aquarium filter, and the mess was from charcoal and fuzzy stuff. Not my problem, people, anything that smells that nice should be distributed around the house!

Some of my people used to call me "Tweaker Cat" because my eyes are so big, they thought I looked like a meth user. Now that I've been here awhile, they can see that I'm not at all like what they thought I would be. I think that's the way it is with everyone in this house. Once we get to know each other, we learn things we didn't expect. Some people are totally focused on changing their lives, making themselves into better people, and some people are totally focused on whatever will make them *feel* better, and they don't know how to *be* better.

The way I see it, my job is to accept them as they are and hope that they find the best way to be. I'll stay at my post at the top of the stairs, and I'll talk to them as they come up, letting them know that I'm on the job. I'll seek them out when I think they need to hear me purr, and I'll rub against their legs, which is my version of a hug. I'll let them tell me their troubles, if they want, while they scratch my back, and they can even complain to me, as long as they keep rubbing under my chin.

I know it's a big job for a little cat, but I'm up to the challenge of life at the Butterfly House.

Word of the Month: Believe

We all use words to praise, to express love, to hurt, to vent our anger, and to try to make others understand us better. We've chosen twelve words that we think can have both very positive and very negative connotations, and we'll take a look at both sides each month.

"For those who *believe*, no explanation is necessary, for those who do not *believe*, no explanation is possible."

Author unknown

Belief is powerful. Our personalities are comprised of many things, but nothing affects our experiences in life as much as what we believe. Some of our beliefs are ingrained from earliest childhood, they may be reinforced by what we observe in our families, and contradicted by what we observe in the world, but they never will completely disappear. We may choose to believe other than what we were taught in childhood, but the old beliefs are always just a memory away.

"The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen."

Frank Lloyd Wright (1869–1959)

Believe in a Higher Power, believe in yourself, believe that what you need and want will come to you. Long before the book "The Secret" was written, many successful, happy people knew that the secret was to *believe!* Believe, have faith to act on what you believe, be grateful for the blessings you receive.

Nurture your mind with great thoughts; to believe in the heroic makes heroes.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804 – 1881)

They were so strong in their beliefs that there came a time when it hardly mattered what exactly those beliefs were; they all fused into a single stubbornness.

Louise Erdrich

We all know people who stubbornly hold fast to beliefs that have proven to be archaic and counterproductive. Belief does not need to be static, some beliefs can be updated to fit the times and science. Just over 500 years ago, the accepted belief was that the world was flat!

I never cease being dumbfounded by the unbelievable things people believe.

Leo Rosten (1908 –)

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

Voltaire (1694 – 1778)

Note that Voltaire lived and died long before the Holocaust. Many people in Nazi Germany truly believed that the Jews had created all the ills of the world; that the Jewish people were less than human. Even more tragic is the knowledge that there are people in the world who still embrace that belief.

Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to believe.

**Laurence J. Peter (1919 – 1988),
misquoting Sir Walter Scott**

Area drug courts report success and tax savings

Pierce County

The Pierce County Drug Court has been active since October 2004. The program currently has 6 participants, has had 9 successful graduations, and 5 terminations. An evaluation of Pierce County's Drug Court system has not only produced productive citizens and given children back their parents, it has saved the county and state well over \$300,000 since its inception. An Alumni group is in the beginning stages, with the hope that all graduates will want to participate. At present 4 members meet on a monthly basis.

St. Croix County

St. Croix County started its Drug Court in April 2006. There are 17 participants. One person has been terminated. So far, there have been no graduates. Total tax payer yearly savings per participant is \$20,858.20

The program also reports 0 recidivism rate, and 0 new crimes committed by participants.

Currently 13 of the participants are working full time jobs and one is working a part time job, with three participants actively looking for employment.

Since the beginning of the St. Croix County Drug Court, three individuals have regained either full or partial custody of their children. All participants with child support orders are now making regular payments towards arrears or current child support orders. One individual has a drug free child on the way. According to Health Watch (Aug 2000) the lifetime medical cost of a drug exposed baby is \$1.4 million, while the cost of special education, foster care and health treatment keeps compounding with each year. The effect that drug-free parents have on their children, even the unborn, as well as the example they set for others is priceless.

