

Steven R. Ariens, Rph, P.D.

Chronic Pain Management Consultant/Pharmacist

812-923-3434

steve@steveariens.com

November 16, 2014

762 Highlander Point Dr PMB 211

Floyds Knobs, IN 47119

Helena Independent Record
317 Cruse Ave
Helena, Montana 59604

Dear Editor,

Why do we criminalize people with mental health issues ?

Mental health issues encompasses a wide range of characteristics demonstrated by a patient, depending on their specific diagnosis. The impact on the patient's quality of life can be from minor to severe and the person is considered to be disabled.

Mental health issues includes Bipolar, Schizophrenia, Psychosis, Depression, Anxiety, ADD/ADHD and Addiction. All mental health issues are considered "subjective diseases". There are no tests that can accurately determine the severity of their mental health issues. Just like no one can look at another person and accurately determine how hungry, thirsty, sleepy they are feeling.

Yes, ADDICTION. Medical science has determined that all addictions should be treated as a mental health disease. There are numerous 12-step programs to help addicts that want to become "clean" from their addiction.

During our country's prohibitionist period in the early part of the 20th century, mostly during the Woodrow Wilson's administration, we passed a number of "morality laws"

The one that still impacts our society today is The Harrison Narcotic Act 1914.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrison_Narcotics_Tax_Act. The genesis of this law was based on racism, bigotry and a war on women.

During this period and because of this law and the prohibitionist mind set of the period, the courts determined that a person abusing a opiate based products was committing a crime and thus the seed was planted for our current war on drugs. Also, this made it illegal for a physician to treat or maintain an addict.

While some claim that these opiate derived substances are HIGHLY ADDICTIVE the truth is that their addiction potential is similar to alcohol and Nicotine. Especially to those that have a underlying addictive personality - a mental health issue.

It is reported that 16 K people die from a "drug overdose" every year. A similar number to the people that die from a hospital acquired MRSA infection, because staff doesn't properly wash their hands. That doesn't count the 300,000 deaths from obesity, 450,000 from tobacco and 88,000 from alcohol use/abuse. Since we have had 1%-2% of the population, for at least the last 100 yrs, abusing some substance - other than alcohol & tobacco - where should we place our resources to save lives ? We are currently spending 51 billion a year fighting the war on drugs.

Even though we have passed two sets of laws - Civil Rights 1964 and Americans with Disability Act 1990 - that prohibit discrimination against certain segments of our population. Law enforcement continues to rely on a 100 yr law to continue to make criminals of those that have a recognized disease and disability.

We also have those in law enforcement, with no medical background, that are making determinations if certain prescribers, pharmacies or patients are prescribing, filling, taking an excessive amount of opiates or other controlled substances. Typically based on raw numbers, rather than the needs of individual patients.

We now have those in law enforcement making medical decisions that are adversely impacting those in chronic pain and being denied their medically necessary medications. We have chronic pain patients that are increasingly committing suicide, and/or being confined to their home, chair or bed because of their inability to get adequate pain management.

Isn't it time that we stop working off of a misguided 100 yr old law, stop discriminating against people with chronic diseases and allow physicians to practice medicine and law enforcement can go after those individuals that are importing illegal drugs and diverting legal drugs to the street.

If another country was denying medical care to its citizens, we would be demanding that they stop violating their citizens' human rights. Why do our citizens deserve less than what we expect from other countries?

Sincerely,



Steven R. Ariens , Rph, P.D.

