



OPIOIDS / ADDICTION

An Answer to the Opioid Crisis

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U.S. Marshals recently held an eye-popping auction in Austin, Texas to sell off luxury cars, such as Lamborghinis, Porsches, Ferraris, Aston Martins and others that were seized from Alabama-based MDs convicted of opioid pill pushing and pharma kickbacks. I was tempted to drive my hail-battered 1990 Toyota to the auction at the Hilton Austin Airport hotel to offer free sessions of chair shiatsu — a tiny way of demonstrating the enormous work we have ahead of us to help turn the opioid crisis around.

Statistics are startling, some 64,000 opioid overdose related deaths in 2016¹ with the cost of opioid overdose admissions to emergency rooms at \$92,000 a time compared with \$58,000 in 2009.² There's an alarming increase in deaths among pill-popping kids or those addicted to "pharma parties." Deaths of young Americans aged 24 and under, doubled from 2005-2015 according to the CDC. Usage is higher on competitive campuses because of affluence and accessibility.³

Cases & Programs

"Joey L." fit an all too common profile. Joey was a teenage jock hooked on opioids after a sport injury, only to find himself tempted by heroin readily available outside his high-school gates. Helping Joey involved encouraging him to practice specific Qi exercises daily to ease his pain, and inspiring him to adapt Qi-inspired stretches and movement in sport to minimize injury and enhance his performance. Determined to break his addictive patterns, he involved himself in an after school project teaching basketball to at-risk kids, and to block an urge to hang out with the wrong crowd.



Regardless of the age of a client, we all know that treatments alone are not enough without a supportive back-up program. Tracking the origin of pain is crucial. "Ingrid A." came to see me because she feared an increased reliance on painkillers to ease fibromyalgia. It didn't take long to spot the source of her problem in an abusive relationship. With encouragement she joined an affordable therapy group, and regular Qigong classes, to add to the heightened Qi she experienced with shiatsu. Not only did this combination help ease her pain, but it gave her confidence to leave her abusive partner.

It's really helpful to expand referral lists to include each and every affordable student clinic (Acupuncture, ABT and MT), along with any clinic offering *low-cost* or *pay-what-you-can* options, especially for the invaluable NADA protocol. Encouraging Tai Chi, Qigong or martial arts classes — where appropriate — can be invaluable too — or cycling and hiking groups, or gym and dance classes. The fit has to be right in a comprehensive, multi-layered approach.

Affordability is the key. Until community health services can offer more walk-in clinics to help bust opioid addiction, especially for folks who aren't insured, switching to alternatives to beat addictions can be challenging for folks whose insurance policies don't cover complementary methods. Jane E. Brody, health editor of *The New York Times* has written an excellent series on accessible ways of counteracting pain — not only in our work and movement re-education through, for example, the Feldenkrais Method,^{4,5} but individual postural alignment, and consciousness around work habits and RSI.

Pain Journals

Tracking the origin of pain involves a heightened awareness of triggering factors, which is where pain journals can be a useful way of pinpointing patterns. I helped a client "Marcus G." in NYC end daily headaches when he realized chocolate was the culprit. He stopped eating a chocolate bar a day and no more headaches. Another client, "Andrea G." suffered from appalling hip pain caused by the hours she spent on a stool teaching piano. Various treatments provided only temporary relief.

Andrea admitted she was addicted to over-the-counter painkillers to get through a day. Solutions were simple — a more comfortable stool at a better height, and a walk around the block early morning and midday, or whenever a student canceled. A neighbor who saw her walking each day was so impressed by her improvement, he signed up his entire family for sessions at the student clinic I was supervising at the time.

References

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