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Season 01. Episode 07

Podcast Title: Bust opioids and smash the ignorance that comes with it

Welcome back to our podcast Busting Addiction and Its Myths.

In September 2018, the rapper Mac Miller died of a drug overdose – a lethal combination of fentanyl, cocaine and alcohol. In July of the same year, Tyler Skaggs, a pitcher for the Los Angeles Angels, and making millions, died of asphyxia – in other words, he choked to death. What did they find in his system? How about fentanyl, oxycodone and alcohol?

It's no surprise that alcohol was a part of the deadly cocktail, but it alone wasn't the reason for the overdose deaths...fentanyl, 100 times more powerful than heroin, was the factor that likely made the cocktail truly deadly.

No matter where you turn these days, cross-addiction, or poly-addiction, is the new normal, if you could even call it that...let's just say that these days, more types of drugs are cheaply and readily available everywhere from the humblest

neighborhoods to the most affluent sanctuaries. No home is safe, because all your kid has to do is get on her smart phone and voila – there is a cornucopia of opioids, including heroin, straight fentanyl, coke, speed, ecstasy, and other emerging new classes of drugs readily available and often delivered to a place of her choosing.

And did you also know that 50 percent of the people charged with a new type of crime – drug-induced homicide (those who sell or provide drugs that end up killing an addict) - are either friends, caretakers, partners or family members? Drug transactions are not as simple as buyer and seller.

Fentanyl is known to have so contaminated the drug supply that it is hard to determine how much control individual sellers have on quality and content. What an irony! Quality control in the illegal drug trade. Well, if it keeps users from dying, then I'm all for it...short of getting them into treatment. Believe it or not, there are now fentanyl test strips that allow people to check their drugs before using or selling them. Again, this is hard to swallow for some people, like the idea of needle exchanges, but we at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand believe that our first priority is saving lives, and preferably by getting addicts into treatment, if not with us, then anywhere where they'll be safe and have a chance to recover.

So why am I titling this episode "Bust opioids and smash the ignorance that comes with it?"

First of all, you should to let the authorities in your home state know where you stand on issues that may affect your family . I'll cover what the issues are in a moment.

Second, there are some really worthwhile organizations you could support to keep you informed and help you get involved and take some action to help others, including perhaps a family member who's at risk.

One of my favorite not for profit groups is called Shatterproof. Just go to shatterproof.org - just like it sounds, and learn how they are moving the needle and creating some momentum to find better ways to prevent and treat addiction - at the level of law enforcement, legislation, in schools and universities and at the volunteer-based, local community level.

I met the founder, Gary Mendel, a few years ago as he was just launching his organization, and you wouldn't believe the fire that he brought to the party. He left

his lucrative investment business *after his son died of a drug overdose* and has since devoted all his energy and talent - his entire life – to improving and even revolutionizing the approach that the authorities at all levels, and local communities take to prevent, arrest and treat addiction.

So far, the Shatterproof community has contacted the members of the US congress more than 3,000 times supporting key addiction legislation in 2019 alone.

Now, YOU have a right to ask: Why am I telling you this?

I am telling you this because maybe just maybe you might want to get involved in taking some positive action that could save another family from the pain of loss, to meet others who are experiencing what you may be experiencing right now, and to actually have some control over your life in a new way. At the very least, even if you don't join alanon, you can take your mind off your quote problem which has you enslaved by another's disease without your permission.

So, back to the issue that Shatterproof is talking about.

Did you know that training in addiction treatment is NOT required by MOST medical schools? That means that if you took your loved one who is abusing drugs or drinking in excess – or you suspect so - to see a primary care physician, or even a psychiatrist – or psychologist for that matter – the odds are very good – better than 50% - that that professional would not be qualified to treat addiction - or recommend a course of action to you and your loved one.

The fact that the odds are LESS than 50% that you will get what you need is 100% true.

It doesn't have to be that way. Not at all, not on your life. The point is that you need to make an informed decision about what is possible at this critical stage in your life. That's why we at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand are ready to answer any, we mean any, question you could possibly have about your loved one's options. We offer a life-changing experience in the perfect environment for recovery, and it's closer than you think.

Back to the medical profession.

Did you know that doctors – any MD, actually - can prescribe OxyContin, a powerful opioid pain killer with no extra training at all, but in order to prescribe

buprenorphine, aka Subutex, to treat a substance abuse disorder to help reduce the risks associated with withdrawal from opioids like heroin and fentanyl, doctors have to jump through all sorts of administrative hoops? Crazy, right?

So while the drug companies continue to wield all this power, doctors are held back from treating the substances abuse disorder that the promoted opioids helped cause to begin with. Sure, there is some free choice involved, but then again, what patient will question her doctor's opinion as to whether it's a good idea to take a powerful opioid to begin with?

And now, here's another factor that makes it a bit scarier: let's say that an addict in recovery needs pain management after surgery, what then? We advise ALL addicts and alcoholics to let the professionals know we are addicts and much more vulnerable to becoming addicted to pain meds than the average Joe or Josephine.

We make sure we look at all pain management options and choose the safest route. If we *are* prescribed a powerful pain med, we put the meds and the med schedule into someone else's hands with strict instructions as to how much to take and when to take the prescribed and only the prescribed meds.

That said, it is plain foolishness to deny ourselves the right medications so that we can heal properly. Anyone who says that addicts should never take pain meds (and I have heard a few, a very few, say that) are recovery Nazis and must be ignored. Don't make the mistake of arguing with these people, by the way.

Getting back to taking some action on issues that will undoubtedly affect drug addicts (it's Ok to say it that way...it's a disease not a moral failing...as we say time and time again) and their families, you need to support all legislation and movements that will raise professional standards on the one hand and lower the barriers to treatment access on the other. In your town, your county, your state and at the national level.

Here is a chance to become a more informed and responsible citizen. Here's the silver lining in the cloud, a chance to do some good, effect a positive change even when things are difficult at home. I have seen parents, especially moms, whose hearts are broken speak eloquently about the peace they have gained by the knowledge that they are helping to solve one of society's most distressing problems if only one small step at a time.

As this episode is being recorded in December 2019, two federal bills are before the US congress and they are worth following:

The first, called the Medication Access and Training Expansion or MATE Act, will require doctors who prescribe controlled substances to receive addiction training, and the Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment act will eliminate the extra waiver doctors need to prescribe buprenorphine, increasing access for patients who desperately need it.

So there you go, raising professional standards on the one hand and lowering the barriers to treatment on the other. Nicely done, and let's support the effort by going online and entering the name of the acts in our search tool, and visit shatterproof.org to follow the latest initiatives, learn more about addiction and about how to support this most worthy not for profit.

Let me circle back to families learning more about what, if anything, they should do about their loved ones' addiction.

We've said this before: come to terms with the fact that you didn't cause the addiction, you can't really control it, although you think you can, and for sure you can't cure it – nobody can. You will see that if you surrender to these truths, you will become liberated.

You may have noticed that I am no longer talking about the addict, I am talking about *you*.

You will find that the only way that you will ultimately attain peace will not depend on which direction your loved one's addiction is going...getting worse, getting a little better or going sideways.

Because you see, the disease has already had its way with you and with the family and with other loved ones. You have all been dancing with the devil as I say it, but you don't know it, it is happening unconsciously, and you all have as much control over this disorder as does your loved one and that is NONE at all. None. Zero.

Your loved one's addiction has sucked up all the oxygen in your house, it dominates your conversations, has you wrapped up in needless shame, you live in fear of the other shoe dropping, (and it will), he or she lives rent free in your head 24/7...you can't escape it. It's a damn nightmare.

Your loved one's addiction has been stealing your money, your peace of mind and your self-worth. And you worry that it will steal your and your loved one's entire future.

Yes, I know all about that.

I have been through this twice in my life, with two different people at two different times: once with my daughter and once with my fiancé...whom I did not marry by the way. A happy ending in a way.

One option for you is to get professional help, NOT to have you learn how to understand or control your loved one's addiction or alcoholism, repeat NOT about that, but to focus on yourself and to address your own do-dependency...BECAUSE you see, your loved addiction has made you sick too!!

OMG you say. I had no idea, or you say BS, I am not sick. Then why does every professional in the world agree with the statement that addiction is a FAMILY DISEASE?? Because without even knowing it, it makes everyone in the family of the addict miserable and crazy as loons.

Co-dependency could be defined as the illusion that if the addict just behaved the way I want him to, then everything would be fine. Life would go back to normal. I would be supremely happy for the rest of my life. That's my Bruno Jay definition. The experts define it using more words and a little more driely:

Codependency is defined as excessive emotional reliance on a partner, typically one who requires support on account of an illness or addiction. It is also characterized by enabling and attempts at controlling the other person's addictive behavior.

Read this book by Melanie Beatty: Co Dependent No More, how to stop controlling others and take better care of yourself.

BINGO. What happens when you let the other person's disorder dominate your life...you have abdicated any sovereignty over yourself and have stopped taking care of YOU.

And most of what you are doing now is a conditioned response below the level of full consciousness...would you have ever neglected your own physical and mental

health, your self-esteem, your social life, your beauty, your confidence were it not for another one's disease? That has now become the family's disease?

So, now what? This is where you start to realize that the disease has beaten you up and you can, yes you can, fight back, at least for yourself.

You will slowly oh so slowly come around and stop feeling guilty that you are doing things for yourself that your loved one's disorder had stolen from you.

Stolen while you weren't watching, a thief in the night. Heartless, and heedless to you needs and to your pain.

This is what you will learn when you read the book or books about co-dependency and talk at length to your AODA (alcohol or drug addiction) professional.

In my next episode, I will talk about why so many family members have gotten help in Alanon family groups whether their loved one is in recovery or not.

What did we learn in this episode?

1. We learned, again, that the vast majority of OD deaths involve multiple substances and the worst of them is fentanyl. Easily gotten on the street.
2. Doctors are typically not trained in treating addictive disorder, but can prescribe opioids freely while they have to go through hoops to prescribe buprenorphine, or Subutex which helps addicts to detox.
3. You can help yourself and others by supporting the efforts by orgs like shatterproof to change the law...raise standards and lower the barriers to treatment access.
4. You can further help yourself by understanding co-dependency, which is caused by the insidious working of your loved one's disease to believe that you need to control him so that you can be "normal".
5. You will see that you need to take care of YOU first if you want to have any chance at your own happiness.

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