

Presentation of:

Mark L. Kraus, M.D. FASAM
Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine
Yale School of Medicine
Chief Medical Officer, Connecticut Counseling Centers, Danbury, CT
General Internist, Westside Medical Group, P.C., Waterbury, CT
Diplomat, American Board of Addiction Medicine

You've heard here this morning that drugs should be legalized because the war on drugs has failed. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the wrong focus. The right focus is prevention, education and treatment!

Addiction is a disease recognized as such by the medical profession not willful misconduct, but a neurophysicochemical dysfunction of the brain circuitry and dysfunction in these circuits will lead to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathological pursuing reward and or relief by substance use and other behaviors. Addiction is characterized by the inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, and craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behavior and interpersonal relationships and a dysfunctional emotional response.

Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.

In 2008, an estimated 8.6 million people used illicit drugs (this number does not include marijuana users). An estimated 2.9 million used an illicit drug for the first time within 2008 as well. Total cost to society for alcohol and other drug dependency is approximately \$475 billion (in health care, crime and productivity). Initiation of illicit drug use typically starts with the abuse of pain relievers or marijuana. SAMHSA found a dramatic increase in adults 50 and older using non-prescribed pain relievers and marijuana.

Prescription drug use is our nation's fastest growing drug problem. Adolescent addiction is on the rise, 85% of adolescents have experimented with

drugs prior to graduating from high school and more than 10% of our youth are in need of clinical intervention for substance abuse.

A major report from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University shows that the state government spent an average of 15% of their entire budget on substance abuse and addiction and its consequences.

Think of the addiction impact.

Public Health: HIV/AIDS

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis C

Subacute Bacterial Endocarditis/Cardiac disease

Pulmonary Disease

Renal Disease

Liver Disease

Motor vehicle accidents /Trauma

Emergency Department visits

Hospitalization

Legal Issues: Property Crimes

Assaults

Incarceration

Teen Issues: Dropout

Increase in teen pregnancies

Sick babies (prenatal withdrawal syndrome)

Foster care, state care of children

Industry: Absenteeism

Decreased productivity

Poorly educated workforce

And on and on...

Legalization will not make things better but worse. Addiction is a disease not willful misconduct. We now have medicine assisted treatments for alcoholism, opiate, and nicotine dependencies and treatment is on the horizon for Cocaine and for marijuana. The chronic disease of addiction can be treated and like other chronic diseases (such as Diabetes, HTN) it can not be cured but arrested.

The cost savings for treatment was shown by the evidence based CALDATA study that for every \$1.00 spent on treatment, \$7.00 is saved. We need not legalize drugs, but apply what we have already paid for science to prevent and treat addiction. We have been down a road where nonmedical people have called it a war on drugs, which may apply to the supply side, but not to the human side.

The cornerstone of contemporary medicine is the application of scientific principals to and the use of extensive clinical research. Addiction treatment saves lives, restores individuals, families, communities and saves dollars. By Legalizing drugs we will not rid society of this chronic brain disease, but we will see more people addicted to drugs.