

Long-term addicts describe paths to better life

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by Sharon Tazewell, WNCN News



The Healing Place in Raleigh

RALEIGH, N.C. -

It's common for doctors to prescribe opiates such as percocet or oxycodone for pain relief.

In fact, the United States leads the world in popping prescription painkillers.

But the number of addictions and overdoses to prescription drugs is escalating. And that's why one man who started using drugs as a young teen is speaking, hoping his story will encourage others to be careful.

"I first shot heroin at 15," said Jimmy Cioe, who started using in the 1960s in Detroit.

"There was a massive explosion of drugs in big cities like that. It was everywhere," he said.

He had his first drug treatment at the age of 16. It wouldn't be his last.

"I was close to prison, or death," he said.

Instead, Cioe has been drug-free for 22 years. He now shares his story to give other addicts hope.

His problem was he became "fully addicted" to narcotics.

He was hooked on prescription drugs, known as opioids or opiates. For some, they can be a godsend to relieve pain. But for others like Cioe, it can become a habit.

"Anything you had. Percodan, Percocet. Codeine. Darvon and those sort of pills," he said.

Many times those were prescribed by a doctor.

When he couldn't get prescriptions, he said, "I manipulated."

"In the state of addiction, you can become quite skilled at it," he said.

Another former drug user is Chris Budnick, now a counselor at The Healing Place in Raleigh. The Healing Place is located near the State Farmers Market and is a recovery and rehabilitation facility for people with alcohol and drug dependency.

"At The Healing Place, a challenge we have is to help keep people alive long enough so that they can find recovery," Budnick said.

Cioe was first prescribed an opiate by his doctor in the 1960s to ease pain after an injury. His injury healed but his mind craved the drug.

When his doctor refused to write another prescription, he shopped for a doctor who would.

He looked for any doctor who would feed his addiction, even finding people with access to prescription paper and faked a doctor's signature.

He said he "exploited that as much as possible."

But eventually, Cioe hit rock bottom.

"I was one of those guys who needed a fair amount of serious wreckage," he said. "I was running out of everything. Running out of money, running out of the ability to physically function."

Cioe said he "was unemployable and screaming for help."

He got it. A female employee realized he was high and drove him to a nearby emergency room.

The hospital workers took his keys and sent him by cab to detox.

"I was sick. Very sick. Like the worst kind of flu. Like your bones are starting to vibrate and on and on," he said.

In his room was another addict who had been there before.

"He said, 'I just want to try it one more time.' And I heard a voice in my head, not my own for the first time ever, and it said, 'How about it, Jimmy? Do you want to try it one more time?' And I flooded with emotion.

"I've been drug-free ever since."

But many of the men at The Healing Place, however, will return.

"Most people with the history of addiction, if they get five years of sustained recovery, their risk of future relapse drops to 15 percent," said Budnick. "We see with opiate addiction, that risk is still between 20 and 25 percent."

Cioe's story is just one of many.

Deaths of prescription opioid painkillers quadrupled from 1999 to 2010, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There were 212 opioid deaths in North Carolina in 2000.

That number jumped to 718 in 2013.

Overall, there were almost 8,000 deaths in 13 years.

According to CDC statistics, the highest rates of overdose deaths from prescription opioid painkillers is whites between the ages of 45 and 54.

But as Cioe knows, finding a clean life is possible.

"I am a man in long term recovery," he said.

About The Healing Place

The Healing Place, located at 1251 Goode Street in Raleigh, will take people with addiction problems, no questions asked. You can find more information here:

- [The Healing Place of Wake County](#)