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The New Drug of the Middle Class: Heroin
From Prescription Drugs to Heroin in Six Months or Less

Would you be surprised to find out that the dad who is coaching your son's Little League team, or your favorite chef from that little restaurant downtown, or that nice Fireman down the street whose kids go to Sunday School with your grandchildren, are all three Heroin addicts? If you are like me you have always thought of Heroin as that terrible drug used only by people in the ghetto, criminals and the occasional wayward rock star, but like me, you would be wrong.

In recent years the increase in heroin use in the middle class rural suburbs has been staggering. It has its roots in the more talked about problem of addiction to prescription painkillers, which has been a growing problem in the middle class for years now. What they don't talk about is that when you become addicted to oxycodone, Oxycontin, hydrocodone, or any of the other opiate-based prescription drug, and then for whatever reason your supply of those prescribed drugs is cut off, there is little you won't do to make the withdrawals stop. Finding those pills "on the street" is a very expensive and difficult proposition with pills going for \$80 each, if you can find them. Then your desperate mind begins to work out other possibilities. "Oxy is an opiate. Heroin is an opiate. Heroin is easier and cheaper to come by. I don't have to *shoot up*, I can snort it or smoke it. Yeah, its heroin, but I'll just use it to wean myself off of this addiction so I don't have to go through the withdrawals cold-turkey."

No one starts taking prescription painkillers with the intent to become addicted to them. It happens while you're looking the other way, while you're just concentrating on healing what hurts. And then one day you wake up and realize that the path to the cure has now become the problem. It is a

vicious cycle because the pain you are still feeling, despite the doctor's insistence that you should be fine now, is quite real. It is not psychosomatic, neither is it an exaggeration or a lie so that you can get more drugs. It is your own body turning against you, manufacturing real pain so that you will give it what it is now addicted to, opioids. You have found yourself taking more and more, needing more and more, to achieve the same relief.

The thing about being addicted to opiates is that you can "function" like a normal person, you can work, you can talk, and you can carry on a façade that hides the truth from everyone around you. In fact you become a consummate actor because *you know* you have a problem, but you can't let anyone else know it or they are going to take your drugs away from you. Then it happens. The doctor has red-flagged your chart, they have figured out through the cyber-connected medical network, that you have more than one doctor prescribing medicine to you and WHAM! Just like that, the jig is up. You are cut off. They will no longer prescribe painkillers for you.

What happens next is a waking nightmare. You begin withdrawals. You sweat, you shake, you vomit again and again, you cannot get warm regardless of the fact that it's mid-July and a hundred degrees in the shade, and the pain—the pain is *unbearable*. In fact it is so bad that you would do almost anything to make it stop because you know if it continues like this it will certainly kill you, because no one can suffer through *this much pain* and live.

There is someone you can call, your cousin with the "drug problem", the "partier" from school, there is always someone who can hook you up. Naturally you have heard all the horror stories about heroin but that's *not* going to happen to you. That's for the "hard-core" users who shoot up. Just like you would never allow yourself to become addicted to prescription meds, right? With Oxy going for \$80 per pill (or \$1 per milligram) versus Heroin at \$160 a gram and withdrawals coloring what is left of your reasoning, the choice is not a hard one. Thus is born the new, deep, dark secret of the middle class. Mom uses Heroin.

Watch for the next article in this series:

The New Drug of the Middle Class: Heroin
Talking to the Middle Class Addict