

## PROBLEM OF OPIATE ABUSE

There is an ever-growing population of individuals who suffer from disabling and crippling chronic pain. These individuals have been taken down the path in which they have been told that by taking medication their pain will be lessened. Today the pharmaceuticals are prescribing approximately 1.4 billion in narcotic medication. This data is only from the records of Workers' Compensation companies. There are many others who use these medications through private insurance or private pay.

This issue of dependence on narcotics has become such a major problem because those who are opiate dependent are not able to do responsible or important work. To return a person to work, the first step has to be removing them from opiate addiction. No employer willingly will hire a person who is opiate dependent. Another issue of course is that we are spending a lot of money in trying to solve a problem that is not being resolved.

Since these individuals have been on medication for years, the question has to be asked, "Are they better?". The answer that most of them give is, "No". There is little medical evidence that has ever been done to support the use of opiates over a long-term. Though, as I work with injured patients, I see that adjusters are routinely and regularly approving renewed claims for these prescriptions.

Individuals who have been prescribed opiates need to work with mental health providers who understand the difference between addiction, tolerance, and physical dependence. All of these are unique and depending on where an individual is in their opiate use, treatment varies. It is important for mental health providers to understand the causes of why individuals become opiate dependent. After finding out the cause it is necessary to work on the solutions which an individual can incorporate for the rest of their lives. As I frequently say, permanent disabilities require permanent solutions.