

ADDICTION

By Anonymous

At four o'clock on Monday morning I knew my addiction was going to destroy me. It was going to drag me through the mire first. I was a successful family doctor in an ideal general practice. I was married to a lovely wife with great children. We owned a splendid old house near a pretty market town. It meant nothing because life's stresses were unbearable and addiction had gotten such a hold of me.

Half an hour earlier I had been dragged out of bed by my wife and confronted. It had been a nightmare week-end. On Saturday afternoon I had been lying stoned under the sheets, blinds down, when she had woken me up, white-faced and furious. I had promised to collect our small son from games ten miles away, and he must now be waiting alone at the freezing sports-ground. Angrily, crazily, I insisted that of course I would go and collect him, just as I said I would. She insisted equally that she would do it now as I was in no fit state; but I won. I seized the keys to her car and drove away, which stopped her arguing. That was why I crashed her car, wrote it off completely. A friendly garage owner drove me home, and now my wife had to be the one to go and collect our son - in my car. I could see that this was a disaster, so unbearable that I had to have more drugs to cope.

This was why my wife found me semiconscious in the bath when she came up later that evening to say that the police were at the door. I panicked at the word police; but it turned out that snow had fallen and the police were worried about a man found lying in the road. They wanted help; could the doctor come? "The doctor" was unable even to get out of the bath, and sent down a message to say that he had flu, and was too unwell to assist. That at least was true. Next day was worse. It was our little girl's birthday party. It should have been lovely. The tiny tots were there and so were their parents. It was not lovely at all. I could barely look at the parents. The avoiding, anxious expression in their eyes said it all; they knew something was desperately

wrong. I felt utterly lonely, resentful and isolated, and I needed more drugs to cope. At three o'clock next morning I needed more still. It was when I came back to bed after using my stash that my wife dragged me downstairs and confronted me. "YOU! ARE! AN ADDICT!" she said, "and unless you stop, you are going to ruin everything for you and all of us. You are going to end up all over the newspapers for killing yourself or someone else."

Even in my insanity, I thought "She's right. I have got to stop; I will stop." And I promised. And that was the last I could remember until a fortnight later when I awoke on a Saturday afternoon, again to find my wife, almost hysterical with rage and anxiety, hammering on my shoulder. The kitchen stove was on fire; I had put on something to cook; it had boiled over, boiled dry, and was now in flames. "How could you do this after you promised? How dare you risk our children's lives?" she screamed. She was starting to think of leaving, and of taking the children - who can blame her?

I lost all hope. It was rock bottom. I had promised to give up and failed. I had not even made any plans or intentions to get and take more drugs, nor any memory of it. It had just happened. I was in the grip of something that had taken over and stripped me of any control. It was a nightmare world. Waking and sleeping, I was now in a constant state of frantic anguish, terror and pain. The next months became a desperate struggle to stop the drugs, repeated over and over. Each time I made a fresh plan, a genuine decision to stop. Each time I would find that I had relapsed without knowing or intending it. Addiction was a power greater than myself. It was wholly malign.

Three months of utter hell passed before my own doctor, a kind man, could admit me to hospital, but in any case I knew that it was all hopeless. Not only did my wife want to leave; my partners wanted me out. It was rock bottom again, deeper and harder. What was the point of going into hospital? I had been in hospital before. Eighteen months earlier, I had been an in-patient for "stress and inappropriate self-medication." The cure, the hospital treatment, had been tried and failed, there was nothing left. Whatever new plans the

hospital may have contemplated, my idea was to find the river nearby as soon as I had any freedom, and drown myself.

One thing alone saved me. On my way to hospital, my wife described an article she had found in one of my medical journals. It had been written by the wife of another doctor-addict, and it described the bizarre and dreadful existence she had led until her husband started to recover. My wife had cut out the article and read it occasionally to reassure herself that her own nightmare life had parallels, that she was not living in a uniquely freakish world that no-one else had ever known. But the article also described how the author's husband had got better. At end there was a telephone number, and the author had finished by saying that if any-one reading her article had a doctor-addict husband like hers, he could ring this telephone number to get help. My wife thrust the article into my hand as I was admitted. I had nothing to lose, so some days later, as soon as I was allowed, I rang the number.

*That phone call became the slender silver thread that led me from destruction to recovery. It brought me visits from two doctors who described their own experiences of disaster and recovery. They had been addicts but had long ceased all drugs and now did not miss them. They were plainly at the peak of their profession. They were relaxed and genial. They advised that I should start going to meetings of two organisations, the **British Doctors and Dentists Group (BDDG)** and **Narcotics Anonymous (NA)**. They also arranged exits from the hospital for me to attend the meetings. Hospital could not help me but those meetings started the miracle of recovery; no less a word will do. The people at the meetings were smiling and at ease. They were welcoming. They knew where I had come from without me having to explain. Their minds and mine had the same blue-print. Some of them described disasters worse than mine, but they also described the varied and fulfilling lives that they were leading now. They had been freed from the compulsion to use drugs.*

Above all, they described how they had done it. They convinced me that I could do it too, but that I could not do it alone; I needed a different power to

set against the malign power of addiction, a power greater than myself that was benign. I still do not know how it all works but I know that it comes from going to meetings. Meetings are an essential part of the magic, the process of recovery. Another essential part was working the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous.

It was and is so simple; it is not always easy. Recovery has called for a lifelong commitment. But it has turned out infinitely worthwhile. Years have passed since those first meetings. I will always be an addict but I have long lost the need for drugs and alcohol - another dangerously addictive drug. This freedom from bondage to addiction is reward enough, but there is more to recovery than that. Stresses have become manageable. Stresses still occur and they always will, particularly for doctors and dentists, but they are tolerable now. Many of them were actually caused by the drugs which I had mistakenly taken to lessen them. I now have a life of much joy. We still have our lovely old house and our practice. My partners are now great friends and we have many others. My wife and family again love me with a special love and I love them with a special love. We are the proof that those who keep coming back stay well, and more than well. It is our common experience that doctors and dentists who maintain their recovery get back to work, and yet it still sometimes a surprise just how varied and rich are the lives they lead. Recovery still unfolds.

*As for me, I know beyond all certainty that I never need experience the terrors and horrors of active addiction again, and for that and so much else, I am full of gratitude to **Narcotics Anonymous** and the **British Doctors and Dentists Group**.*