

Addiction and Shame

I am a firm believer in the old adage that “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. As such, my prior articles have generally focused on the importance of drug prevention programs. However, when it comes to the issue of “drugs”, every now and then we need the proverbial “pound of cure”.

Statistics indicate that almost 10% of all Americans over the age of 12 (approximately 23.5 million people) suffer from some form of drug addiction or dependency. However, those same statistics indicate that only 11% of those who are addicted or dependent (approximately 2.6 million people) obtain the necessary treatment. I believe that one of the things that causes this lack of treatment is a pervasive sense of shame.

The general public may be surprised to learn that addicts often feel ashamed. Ashamed that they started using drugs. Ashamed that they cannot kick the habit. Ashamed of the things that they do in order to obtain their drug of choice. Oftentimes the addict is not the only person who feels ashamed. The addict’s parents, spouse and other family members often feel some sense of shame. They feel that they would be looked down upon by the community at large if anyone knew that their loved one was struggling with addiction – “What would my friends and neighbors think?” becomes a paralyzing question in the minds of many. The imagined response to this theoretical question often leads to inaction or, even worse, enabling – actions that are taken with the best of intentions, but which result in the addict avoiding the natural consequences of his addiction, such as a loved one lying to the addict’s boss about why the addict failed to show up at work.

However, the statistics would indicate that almost nobody has gone through life unaffected by this issue in some shape, manner or form. Moreover, and in a much larger sense, no sense of concern over what the neighbor may think can outweigh the burden that you will carry for the rest of your life if you are addicted, or if you are aware of a loved one’s addiction, but you did nothing because you are concerned about trying to maintain appearances. Obtaining a sustained recovery is possible, but never easy. If you do not know where to turn, just dial 2-1-1 and ask for help.