

BATTLE AGAINST HEROIN — PART 3 OF A 3-DAY SERIES

Heroin addicts face a long road to recovery

Continued from A1

Terry Newton, director of Harbor Hall, said when the center first started treating opiate addictions around 2000, between 85 percent and 90 percent would leave during detox.

"Opiates are the most painful detox imaginable," Newton said. "Their mind literally starts screaming to get that drug."

Now, about 80 percent of opiate patients make it through detox, Newton said, but it is not easy. Heroin addicts often curl in the corner, their entire bodies in pain. They typically defecate everywhere, Newton said, the constipation caused by heroin use stopped. They vomit, have chills and shed uncontrollable tears.

"Sometimes they'll just go through three weeks of hell," said John Tuomela, a counselor at Harbor Hall. "They're really experiencing the cost of an addiction."

Then it is time to start fixing.

Treatment begins

Tuomela's group is so often filled with people from Jackson it took on the nickname "the Jackson Group." Pritchard calls it "the Sandbox." The grown men in the group learn skills most children master in the sandbox, Pritchard said.

Harbor Hall uses the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Within the first five weeks of a 90-day stint, a person might work only through the first step, admitting powerlessness over the addiction and that life has become unmanageable. In working the first step, patients write a paper describing their lives while using. Pritchard's first step paper, after many drafts, clocked in between 20 and 30 pages, Tuomela said.

"A lot of reading. A lot of writing," Tuomela said. "The thing you need to understand about treatment is we try to keep it as simple as possible."

It is simple but tough. A recovering alcoholic himself, Tuomela checked into Harbor Hall in 1983 before getting sober and eventually getting a master's degree in clinical



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Joe Pritchard, right, laughs with his counselor, John Tuomela, at Harbor Hall in Petoskey, where Pritchard was being treated for heroin addiction.

social work. He knows the addict's games. They downplay or glorify their addiction, choose to avoid the real reasons behind it. Tuomela takes no garbage. He often throws out lengthy, hand-written papers, and forces addicts to start from scratch.

Addicts read their papers to small groups and to the entire house. They sit through lectures, learn the difference between shame and guilt, and learn how to deal with anger. They must make their small bed each morning. They do chores, such as washing dishes or cleaning, which they rush through to take a smoke break on the house's back porch or lawn. Not one cigarette butt litters the grounds.

Addicts in Tuomela's group must develop and stick to a workout plan, making use of a collection of gym equipment in the basement. Most fight it.

"The healthier the person, the less pain they are in, so there's less self-medicating," Tuomela reasons.

Pritchard credits Tuomela with keeping him at Harbor Hall. Since the day Pritchard started using, he had lied to himself and others about it. Tuomela did not let him lie. He saw through the facade, Pritchard said.

Pritchard bought into what Tuomela was teaching, put his head down and started working. Painful memories arose in group, and Pritchard dealt with them without getting high.

Making progress

After 45 days, Pritchard and Tuomela sat down for a mid-treatment review. Pritchard had been making progress on the 19 problem areas in his life he and Tuomela identified, such as shame, tobacco use, poor use of leisure time, lack of exercise and depression.

"He's making progress," Tuomela said. "He knew he had a problem, but he didn't know what to do about it."

Pritchard said the list, several pages long in a three-ring binder devoted to his recovery, is not intimidating.

"It just seems to work, I know for me at least it has," Pritchard said. "There are some days when I think to myself, 'Do I really truly think like this now?'"

He pauses. "I just do." If it sounds like Pritchard has been brainwashed, that's the point, Tuomela said. Harbor Hall creates a shift in personality, a shift from the danger of addiction to the stability of recovery.

"The disease of addiction is a heck of a lot stronger than the individual," said John Tumble, a counselor at Harbor Hall and recovering alcoholic. "You're never cured of it."

Battling the dealers

It is an ongoing battle for law enforcement as well.

Officers with the Jackson Narcotic Enforcement Team buy the drug on the street, building cases against dealers. They flip everyday users into

informants who lead them to dealers. They said they take information from neighbors to bust drug houses. Much of what they do is secret. JNET officers will not go into much detail about their work. They do not want dealers and users to know their tricks.

Lt. Dave Cook, who heads JNET, calls it normal drug-enforcement work but not a solution to the problem.

"It's like any drug," Cook said. "All we can do is put a lid on it and keep it under control."

In Waterloo Township, Police Chief Tom Cottrell is trying to keep addicts alive.

Waterloo, like other rural communities, is not immune to heroin. Cottrell noticed a small problem when he took over as the township's top cop four years ago.

"It's kind of grown like a cancer from there," he said.

Cottrell knows a handful of the addicts in the township. He stays in touch with them, keeps their numbers in his cell phone. Locking them up repeatedly helps little.

He hands out books on beating addiction. They are stacked up in his office.

"I feel a moral obligation," Cottrell said. "Part of what I believe we have to do is protect people from their own stupidity. I'm just trying to keep these kids alive."

Grass Lake, too, is fighting back. Since the fatal heroin overdose of 24-year-old Andrew Hirst in May, the close-knit community has taken a hard look at the havoc wreaked by hard drugs.

Parents, teachers, principals, drug-education experts and officers from JNET and the Jackson County Sheriff's Office met with Michael Hirst, Andrew Hirst's father, at the Grass Lake Township hall. They formed a coalition, now with more than 20 people, committed to stopping the dealers, helping the addicts, getting heroin out of their community and spreading information about the drug.

Where to go for help

There are several agencies in Jackson County with services to help people with addictions. If you see drug activity, call 911, your local police department or the Jackson County TIP Line at 787-0212.

For help:

■ Alcoholics Anonymous, 789-8883, 20 groups in Jackson County hold meetings throughout the week. Schedule of meetings available at http://area32d2.org/Jackson_meeting_list.html

■ Narcotics Anonymous, groups hold 15 meetings a week in Jackson. Schedule available at www.michigan-na.org/s_mid_michigan/s_mid_mich_meetings.html.

■ Allegiance Addiction Recovery Center (formerly Washington Way), 782-4001, 2424 W. Washington Ave., www.allegiancehealth.org/location.aspx?id=820. Offers residential treatment and day and evening programs for adults to help them during treatment.

■ Allegiance Substance Abuse Services (formerly Bridgeway Center), 783-2732, 323 W. Michigan Ave., www.allegiancehealth.org/location.aspx?id=822. Offers counseling and support to individuals and families struggling with addiction.

■ Harbor Hall, 888-880-5511, 704 Emmet St., Petoskey, www.harborhall.com. Residential alcohol and drug treatment center.

■ Brighton Hospital, 877-9-SOBER-1, 12851 Grand River Road, Brighton, www.brightonhospital.org. In- and out-patient treatment for drug and alcohol addiction.

A searchable list of treatment centers in Michigan is available at www.treatment-centers.net/treatment-directory/michigan.html.

Michael Hirst wants to scare away young people from ever trying it.

"These kids have no idea what they are getting into," Hirst said. "These kids, they weren't born heroin addicts, they were born normal people, but this drug, it terrorizes their soul."

Rebuilding a life

Pritchard wants the terror to stop. By May, halfway through his treatment, he traded his orange jump suit for shorts and a golf shirt. The nervous and guilt-ridden look his face carried in jail and court had faded, as had his track marks.

He wants to rebuild his family and wants to be a father again. With his wife, Melissa, also in treatment for heroin, his family is scattered. His 21-

year-old son still lives at home. His 19-year-old daughter has moved in with her boyfriend. His 14-year-old daughter is living with friends.

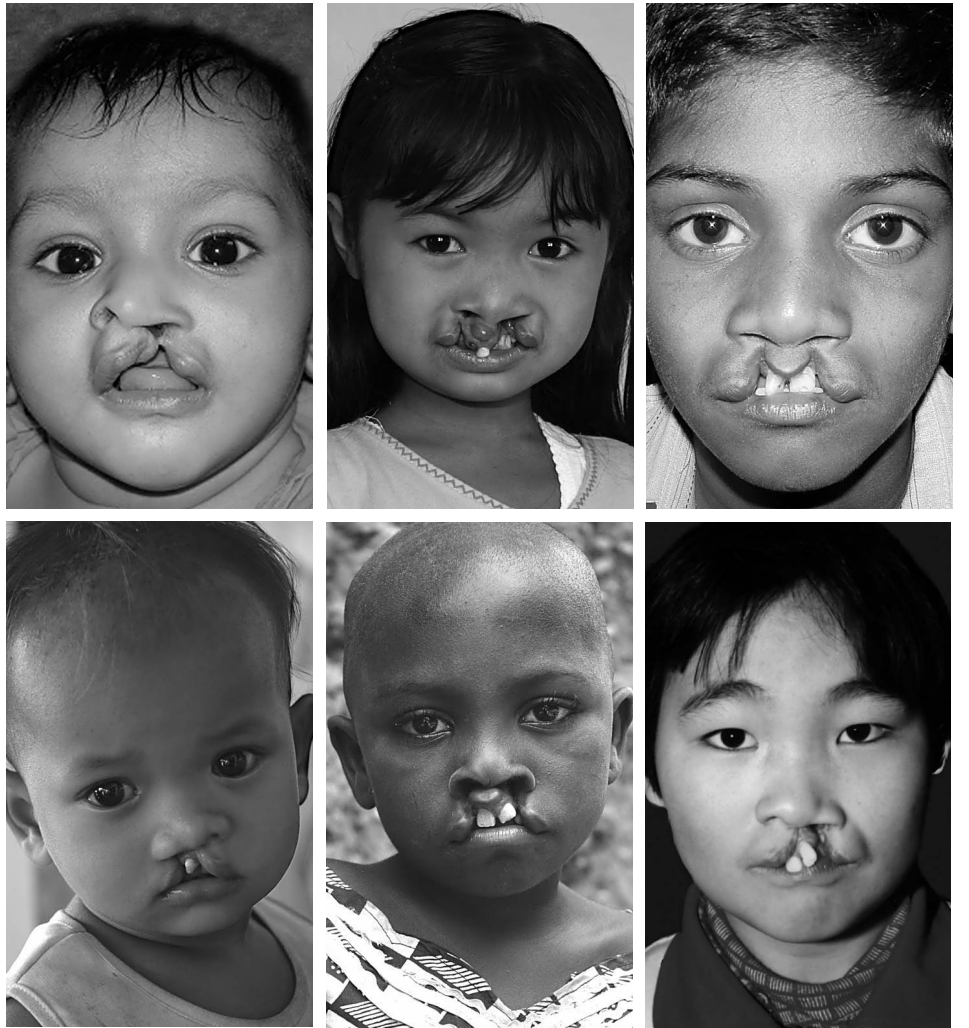
When he was using, Pritchard said he gave up on them. He quit coaching his son in hockey, his daughters in soccer. He said he wished they would go to bed early at night so he could get high.

"My two older kids actually remember when they had a good life. By the grace of God, I think they hold onto that," Pritchard said. "My 14-year-old daughter, she's not really granted that privilege. She just remembers the chaos."

Pritchard came home July 12 — no party, no "Welcome Home" banner. He is not cured. He is in recovery.

"I actually have hope in my life again," he said. "I'm happy now."

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Schools might focus on danger of heroin

By Aaron Aupperlee
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Most teens don't use heroin. Most don't know anyone who does.

But fast forward a few years.

While studies show heroin use in Jackson-area high schools is rare, some young adults are becoming addicted, causing drug educators to rethink their approach.

Short lessons on the drug and its dangers could start in schools next year, said Shelly Milligan, coordinator of the Breakout Drug Education Program taught in county schools.

"We're not getting an awful lot of questions about heroin, one or two kids," Milligan said. "But it's something that we're concerned about."

Eleven Jackson County students out of the 2,864 surveyed in 2008 reported using heroin, according to the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth survey. The study, conducted every other year, asks middle school and high school students to report what drugs they and their peers are using.

"Heroin isn't one we target and focus on," said Steve Sukta, health-education coordinator for the Jackson County Intermediate School District. "It doesn't make sense to design a prevention program because we know that by the time they use heroin, there are plenty of steps between."

Drug education in high school focuses on alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, drugs that can lead to experimentation with harder substances, Sukta said. Almost 800 high

How heroin stacks up

The curriculum for the Jackson County's drug-prevention program in schools is based on data from the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth. The survey asks middle school and high school students to self-report drugs they and their friends are using. In the 2008 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth report, 2,864 Jackson County students completed the survey. Heroin ranked at the bottom. Data from the 2010 survey should be available this fall.

Substance	Number of students who recently used
Alcohol.....	767
Tobacco.....	459
Marijuana.....	449
Inhalants (paint, glue).....	94
Club drugs (Ecstasy).....	55
Cocaine.....	38
Steroids.....	36
Methamphetamine.....	30
Heroin.....	11

Source: Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth, Michigan Department of Education

school students reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days, 459 smoked tobacco and 449 used marijuana, according to the healthy youth survey.

Milligan said educating students about the dangers of a drug, even one not popular in school, can discourage use. About six years ago, she started lessons on methamphetamine.

"A lot of kids had heard of it, had some idea, but they were being given wrong information," she said of meth. "They didn't know all the side effects."

Milligan put together a slideshow of photographs showing eroded teeth, pock-marked faces, skin sores and other signs of meth use. Most students, after the seeing the

slideshow, would wonder aloud, "Who in the world would ever do this garbage?" she said.

She expects to address heroin education in the same way. Information and photographs of track marks and people shooting the drug in between their toes could work.

"If we get the same reaction that we've gotten with meth, I would be pleased," she said.

ADVICE

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