

Why You Should Care About the Opioid Epidemic

Dear Denise:

I don't know anyone who uses, why should the opioid epidemic matter to me?

Sincerely,

Wendy

Dear Wendy:

This is a great question to start off this column. A question I am sure many people have interest in.

Statistics show that there is a widespread problem with regards to this epidemic in Surry County and sometimes we just don't know what we don't know.

Do you go to the dentist? Do you have a favorite doctor who takes care of you? When you need care is a nurse important to you? One of the main things about this opioid problem is that it is a little different than addictions we are most familiar with. This epidemic began with prescribing legal drugs by doctors. Even now, most people can't understand this addiction because these pills are legally prescribed by doctors mostly for relieving pain. Fact, almost anything can be abused and misused. This is a perfect example. Access and opportunity play a big role in the prescription drug part of this epidemic. Many medical professionals around the country have been caught up in this epidemic. Some of the effects of abusing opioids are losing focus, being overly tired, bad judgement, anger and control. Often it is difficult to recognize this in people who use when we only see them once in awhile. Most of the time there is no smell (like with alcohol) or overt signs of use (like stumbling or slurring words). Have you ever seen the tv programs "House" or "Nurse Jackie"? One about a doctor and one about a nurse who abuse prescription drugs but still continue care of their patients. Although these are fictional depictions that were drawn from the real world, this should be a concern for everyone who goes to a medical professional for help.

Would you like to know that the pilot flying your plane or the taxi driver taking you to your destination misuses medication? How about just being on our roads and highways at the same time someone who is using happens to be there too? Is this a concern?

Frankly, just about every human has some access to prescription pills available for abuse. Teachers, first responders, bankers, lawyers, crossing guards, etc.

Did you know that heroin users use syringes? Sometimes people who abuse pills also melt them down and inject with syringes. Have you ever seen used syringes in a public bathroom, parking lot, on the street? Do you know that they are often found on playgrounds, accessible to kids? Should this be something we all should care about?

From my own experience I know that not only people who use these drugs but also those who love them experience many bouts of low focus, distraction, lack of sleep, and energy. How does this affect productivity in the workplace? It is a very negative force and happens everywhere. Should we all be concerned?

These are just a few examples for why everyone should care about helping Surry County to combat this epidemic to bring health and well-being for all who live here.

One more thing that I feel important to mention, again learned from my own experience. Addiction carries huge stigma, with many people believing it involves low or no moral character and criminality. Most people do not share that they are experiencing this in their own families or workplace because of this. This question posed here, ("I don't know anyone who uses, why should I care about the opioid epidemic?"), brings me to a question for you and all readers.

Do you really not know someone who uses, or perhaps you just don't know that you know?

Regards,
Denise Krochta
Surry County Opioid Response