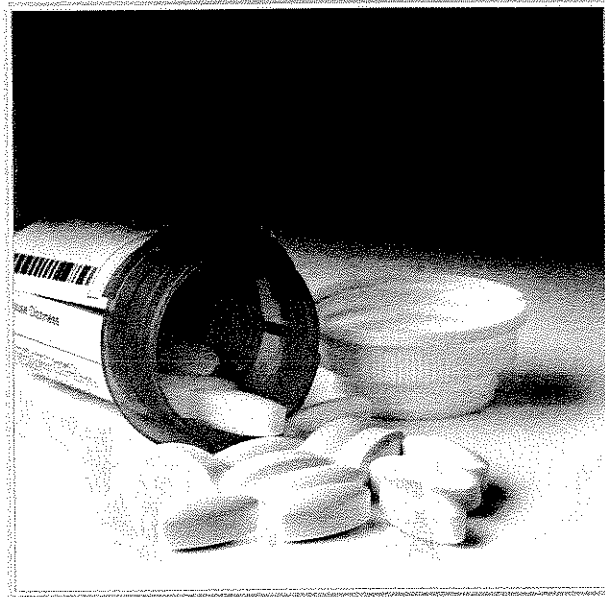


THE WEST VIRGINIA PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE QUITLINE:

Help is Just a Call Away

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"Thank you for calling the West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline. How may I help you?" On the other end of the phone, a soft voice says, "Can you help me? I never thought I'd be this way. What has happened to my life?"

For West Virginians lost in prescription drug addiction and for those who suffer alongside them, the start down a new path can begin with a phone call. In response to the growing epidemic of prescription drug abuse in Appalachia, and West Virginia specifically, the WVPDAQ (1-866-WV-QUIT) was developed and currently serves as a resource for prescription drug abuse education, treatment options, and support. As of March 1, 2010, over 1,000 callers have taken advantage of the services provided by the Quitline. During follow-up calls, approximately 20 percent of callers report obtaining a counseling or treatment appointment as a result of their interactions with the phone educators.

While every caller is different, they are not alone in the darkness of their addiction. "I just can't seem to get it together. I hate this about myself. I will take my last dollar, even though I know I shouldn't, and buy that pill." Aggravation, desperation, and

frustration are common themes among Quitline callers. Many report beginning very innocently taking doctor-prescribed opioids for physical pain, others to relieve mental health symptoms such as anxiety. Eventually, when the doctor stops writing prescriptions, they find themselves dependent or addicted to the substance that once brought them relief. Now they find themselves desperately seeking their next pill: "I never thought it would get this far. I can't believe I'm looking for drugs."

The Quitline helps callers through various means. For example, the Quitline may assist one caller through psychoeducation, while another may need assistance finding substance abuse treatment centers or community support such as Narcotics Anonymous. Others just desire a friendly voice, someone who will listen to their story.

On one snowy afternoon, a wife, tearful and determined, called the Quitline. "We just saw your commercial. Can you help my husband?"

"Danny" soon came to the phone and, after clearing his voice a couple of times, spoke of his addiction to "Oxys" and "Tabs." Five years ago, he was in an accident and continues to suffer with the

pain. A business owner with no insurance, he took his original emergency room doctor's prescriptions for OxyContin until they were gone. Still faced with pain and not able to pay for surgery, he self-medicated with prescription drugs he could buy on the street. He knew he could not continue this way. Danny spoke about his

been up on the mountain for a job and didn't have good cell phone reception. I see you've called several times."

The educator checked in with Danny to see how his search for treatment was coming along, and he reported that a treatment center had a bed available.

He would be required to spend two weeks there and then continue his treatment on an outpatient basis.

"I just want this to start, to get through this, and get my life back," Danny said. "This life is hard and I'm tired, I'm tired of living this way."

A date three months out was set for an educator to call Danny. Standard Quitline protocol requires educators to make seven attempts to reach a caller for follow up. For Danny, it was the seventh attempt when he answered: "Hey, you called me back. It's good to hear from you. I made it!"

Danny was actively participating in outpatient treatment. Now he attends his treatment appointments as scheduled, sees a mental health counselor weekly to address behavioral habits and old thought patterns, and attends a Narcotics Anonymous meeting once a week.

Danny's family members have rallied around him and help him get through his toughest days. "My brother will pick me up some days and we'll go for a country ride in the old pickup truck."

He calls his mom more often now, and on Sundays, his family has started having sit-down meals together. He says his treatment has not only helped him but also his whole family.

Danny understands he is just beginning his life in recovery and knows he must keep his mind set on his goal of staying clean. He thinks of his past, looks ahead to his future, and tells the educator, "It can only get better from here."

There are many more people like "Danny" and his family who are struggling with prescription drug abuse. The Quitline team hopes to continue the mission of providing treatment resources, outreach, and research for the people of West Virginia. ❖



responsibilities, his wife, his children, and his team of employees who depend on him for their jobs. He was reaching out for help. The educator suggested treatment centers in his area and doctors who prescribe Suboxone (a drug used to treat opiate addiction). Self-help educational material was also mailed to Danny.

The Quitline offers up to three follow-up service calls for those interested in speaking with an educator again. Danny agreed to the first follow up seven days away. During the call, he expressed frustration, indicating that he had contacted all the treatment centers in his area and found that they had waiting lists, with some thirty to sixty days before an initial intake assessment could be scheduled. He called all of the doctors who prescribe Suboxone but was told they had reached their 100-patient maximum. Then the educator expanded the search to several local counties and found more treatment centers and doctors.

Danny agreed to a second follow up in four weeks. However, the educators had a difficult time reaching him for the follow-up call. Contact was attempted for several days via the phone number Danny had provided. On the sixth day, he called the Quitline: "Have ya'll been trying to reach me? I've

Tara Surber Fedis is program manager and lead counselor for the Quitline. Dr. Keith Zullig serves as a principal investigator and provides oversight for the research associated with the project. Laura Lander is the co-investigator and serves as clinical supervisor.

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Billboard image courtesy West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline.