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NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

USE OF MEDICATION IN RECOVERY

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Approved Literature

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USE OF MEDICATION IN RECOVERY

An area of personal experience in recovery that has sometimes provoked long and frequently painful discussions is the topic of use of medication in recovery. N.A. is a program of total abstinence. There are times, however, such as during serious health problems and mental illness, when use of medication may be valid. There is no safe use of drugs for us. Our bodies don't know the difference between drugs prescribed by a physician for pain and drugs prescribed by ourselves to get high. As addicts, our skill at self-deception will be at a peak in such a situation. Often, our minds will even manufacture additional pain as an excuse to use.

Many a newcomer, suffering the symptoms of denial and looking for a loophole in the concept of total abstinence asks questions about operations or severe accidents. Others will ask about serious chronic diseases such as epilepsy or psychotic disorders. It is an easy way out to answer these questions with, "We are not doctors," and avoid the issue altogether, but this doesn't carry the message of recovery. Some of us might answer these questions and speak of total abstinence with self-righteous indignation, forgetting that we are not doctors and blinding ourselves to the reality of another's genuine medical needs, leaving no room for deviance from N.A. philosophy of total abstinence.

We are not physicians, but we can talk about the problems of the use of medication in recovery from our group experience as recovering addicts. We have lost the ability to medicate ourselves. When we take the First Step, we admit we are powerless over our addiction and we are in even more danger when fear and pain cloud our judgment. We

are risking something greater than pain. We are risking the death and insanity or imprisonment that relapse brings and we are responsible for exposing ourselves to these dangers. There are alternatives to medication that are viable and effective. We were willing to go to any lengths to become drug free and we should be willing to go to any lengths to maintain this freedom.

It is our desire in writing this pamphlet that we will neither exclude nor condemn, but share honestly and openly our own individual experiences with prescribed medication in recovery. Our hope is that by sharing our pain and our spiritual growth that we may help another addict to find his own answers to his own problems.

PREPARING YOUR DOCTOR

It is impossible for any doctor to provide us with essential health care unless we advise them of our addiction history. We have to remember that doctors often practice drug oriented health care and have no reason to treat our special condition differently unless we make perfectly clear the critical dangers involved with our usage of mood altering chemicals. With complete knowledge of our individual drug history, our doctors can perform their healing task with the greatest possible competence without leading us into a relapse. Do not be afraid to ask your doctor of his plans for your particular treatment. Ultimately, we have to take the responsibility of knowing what is happening to us. Being sincere and frank with your doctor may convince him of your intentions; ask your doctor to read this pamphlet, it just may save your life.

LEGITIMATE NEEDS

As addicts, we are subject to many of the same problems as anyone else. Just because

we have changed our lifestyle and arrested our addiction does not mean we will never have to undergo an operation or suffer injury. We may possibly suffer a serious chronic disease where it is deemed necessary by a properly informed doctor that we use certain medication. One of the biggest problems in this area is how to determine what is a legitimate need for medication.

Most of us have had a great deal of difficulty with self-honesty. Frequently we share our problems and allow others to help us make the decision. Remember - an addict alone is in bad company. It would be impossible for us to list all the possibilities that may arise. Our business is to establish general and, in some areas, specific, guidelines that have proven successful in our recovery. The N.A. Program is not going to suggest that a person subject himself to serious surgery without the use of pain-relieving medication. The important point to remember when faced with this type of situation is who we are and the type of behavior we have displayed in the past. Once again, the importance of being honest with our doctor is imperative. We have to rely on our doctor and God during surgery. After surgery, if medication is needed, an alternative to mind altering drugs is frequently available. We should ask the help of the group and our sponsor during these times.

Many of us have been diagnosed as having a variety of mental disorders. We wore labels like comfortable garments and used each to justify another drug. There are rare situations where there is no way around using medication. We cannot self-righteously condemn the addict in recovery who may have to use anti-depressants for organic depression or medication for epilepsy. We recognize that on rare occasions an addict may need one of these types of medication. Our experience

has shown us that these people often have difficulty with growth in the Program. These addicts often do not feel fully accepted or acceptable members. It is frequently difficult for them to fully surrender to our concept of total abstinence. The nature of their secondary problem sets them apart, and promotes the thinking "I am different". Our experience has shown that these people are often treading a dangerously fine line between cleanliness and relapse. Someone who has to take medication can sometimes get caught up in the insidious thinking that justifies taking another and still another type of drug.

ALTERNATIVES TO MEDICATION

In some cases of physical illness alternatives to medication have been successfully used by N.A. members. We suggest that you use what is best for you individually by asking guidance from your Higher Power, your sponsor, and your informed doctor. This is a simple program and there are simple remedies that can help reduce the pain and take your mind off of the pain. Quite often, pain is magnified in our minds. By doing certain things, you can keep your mind off the discomforts that physical illness brings. Some of the things we have used are: reading N.A. literature, working with other addicts, and sharing with others the feeling we are experiencing. By keeping our priorities in order, we are able to continue with our lives, one day at a time. Some other methods include relaxation techniques, chiropractic, acupuncture, vitamin therapy, special diets, physical therapy, acupressure, reflexology and hypnosis.

MEDICATION OF WHICH TO BE CAUTIOUS

Street drugs are never a solution to physical or mental disorders that confront recovering addicts.

Over-the-counter drugs have opened up endless confusion to the recovering addict. Always consult a pharmacist as to the composition of any medication in any form--pills, capsules, tablets, liquid, etc. Don't assume anything. Read labels and become informed of contents. Talk to experienced N.A. members and find out if they have had any experience with the type of medication you are thinking of taking. Be especially careful of cold, cough and flu remedies. These often contain alcohol or other mood altering chemicals which can trigger our addiction. Avoid any medication offered by well meaning friends or family members. Remember that we are recovering addicts and all medications are suspect.

PREPARING OURSELVES PHYSICALLY

We have abused ourselves physically during our addiction. Because of this we may be more susceptible to physical illness and pain. It is important that we maintain our health through proper diet, exercise and periodic check-ups by our doctor. Remember, a doctor cannot give accurate advice unless he is aware of our history as addicts.

PREPARING OURSELVES MENTALLY

By talking to others who have experienced similar afflictions to our own, we can learn what to expect during these times. Keep in mind that the consequences of ridding ourselves of the pain through medication and possible subsequent relapse are greater than the consequences of enduring the pain. It is amazing how our minds will just go back so quickly to our old ways and thinking. We should think long and hard before seeking chemical relief from short term physical suffering.

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

We have found through our experience, that a combination of talking about our fears and anxieties with the group, our sponsor, with our Higher Power, through prayer and meditation, along with reading our book and other literature on recovery can help in our spiritual preparation.

When placed in these crisis situations, we should remember there is a Power greater than ourselves who will help when asked. Some of us have asked God to keep us from getting caught up in our disease again through active use of prescribed medication. Others have written their feelings before, during and after the use of medication. These are a few of the ways that we can prepare ourselves spiritually for medication during recovery.

Remember--you are playing with life and death. Anytime an addict uses any medication, he is on the fence; recovery on one side and relapse on the other. Through spiritual preparation, our chances of surviving the use of medication during recovery are much greater. These resources should be a part of every phase of any ordeal.

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE FACE ORAL SURGERY

Inform your oral surgeon the same way you would your doctor. Inquire as to the types and methods he uses. Get a second opinion. Prepare yourself the same way you would whenever you face using medication.

WHAT CAN WE DO WHEN CONFRONTED WITH AN EMERGENCY SITUATION

Pray first when possible. Call someone in the N.A. program (sponsor, friend, etc.). If you

can't elaborate on your addiction, have them call someone in the emergency room staff, the same way you would your own doctor. It's really important to maintain your self-honesty in these crisis situations, because the chance of relapse is greater.

WHAT TO DO IN OUTPATIENT SITUATIONS

Upon release from the hospital, your recovery does not cease. Continue working toward the Steps, attend a meeting the same day if possible, and contact your sponsor. If you are unable to attend a meeting, ask the group to bring you one. Extended hospital stays may be better than taking home medication. This will also help us if any withdrawal should occur.

Whatever pain we experience will pass. It is amazing how much pain we can really handle without medication. In this program of total abstinence, however, we need not feel any guilt after having taken a minimum amount of medication prescribed by an informed doctor.