

Drug Abuse . . . How are we handling it?

At the age of 14 Max (fictitious name) started smoking marijuana which he smoked at parties and in his bedroom at home.

At the age of 17 he was diagnosed with Schizophrenia (Sa) which, according to the medical profession, was **not** drug induced.

It is believed the marijuana was taken to escape from the onset of symptoms of Sa.

For the last 12 months, he has become totally drug dependent.

How drug abuse affects Family Relationships

The family has suffered from Max's symptoms of Sa / drug abuse for the last 3 years. Affects have been:

- verbal aggressiveness - at one stage he was verbally abusive full-on for a 3-month period
- Max was verbally and physically abusive to the family dog for a 3 month period
- some family members were aware that for a time marijuana was being sold by the son from the house – reason this was not reported to the Police was because of real fear of Max's reaction
- there is some form of upsetting incident every day
- younger brother has said it is so peaceful when Max is asleep
- younger brother was found in a compromising position (attempted suicide) - diagnosed by a psychiatrist as a cry for help - required 6 months treatment with a psychiatrist after that
- parents cannot leave younger brother on his own with Max
- siblings have fear of death of Max
- other siblings at times resent the attention given to Max and have at times said they wished he was dead
- sister who does not reside at home cannot stand visiting at times because of his behaviour and departs stating she cannot stand it any longer

- situation has taken over the parents' lives
- father and mother are ashamed of the situation
- father did blame himself but not now
- father is grieving for the son he has 'lost'
- father has stated at one stage that Max would be better off dead
- all relationships in the family have been negatively affected
- parents at times would like him to leave home but at the moment the mother cannot bring herself to do that as she knows her son could die as a consequence
- commitment required by mother to remind Max and transport him to the Police Station for bail; Court appearances; visits and phone calls to Correctional Services; visits to doctors and drug counsellors
- consistently being harrassed by Max to visit GP's for prescription medication, ie valium, mogodon, clonidine, diazepam, panadeine forte, normison, adrenaline
- sheer terror for the parents on a consistent basis, not knowing the amount/type of drug usage on return to home of the user
- parents have to hide wallets and money from Max
- mother describes last few years as
 - nightmare
 - hell
 - ambulances
 - hospital
 - police

Note: There have been addictions on both sides of the family

How drug abuse affects crime, violence and law enforcement

- conflict between drug users (friends)' parents and the children
- Max said he wanted to 'smack' his sister because she would not return the prescription he had (she in fact saved his life and that of his drug-user friend, by taking it from him - there were enough drugs prescribed to kill)
- since taking Heroin Max has been destructive towards furniture

- Max becomes very angry easily and has punched holes in walls and similar
- family dog has been physically and verbally abused by Max
- has been charged with fraud, stealing, break-and-enters (have admitted to 40), possession of dirty needles

How drug abuse affects road trauma

- Max does not have a license to drive but his friends (who are users) drive while under the influence of drugs
- Mother has called Police to warn them that son's user friends have driven under the influence of drugs

How drug abuse affects workplace safety and productivity

Not applicable in this case as son has never worked.

How drug abuse affects health care costs

This has not been an issue as the public system has been utilised.

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

- Doctors have provided prescriptions without knowing Max. Even though 80 local GP's were faxed with a pleading letter from parents (and the parents of their son's user-friend) (attached), some have still prescribed medication for Max for supposedly detoxing off heroin
- Local chemist still dispensed medication against mother's pleading not to dispense anything. Mother was informed by the chemist that it would be breaching confidentiality by phoning the parents.
- Queensland Health Insurance Commission has a hotline that GP's may contact which provides names of "doctor-shoppers". However, many GP's are not using this hotline and are prescribing drugs at random. (Is it because it means no Medicare rebate for the GP???)
- Psychiatrists will not admit Max as a psychiatric patient because they consider it is a drug problem, not psychiatric

- Max has been revived twice that family are aware of; he has been transported by Ambulance to Emergency 3 times due to prescription drugs and once due to combination of prescription drugs and heroin
- Max has revived another user
- Max has a friend who is suicidal at the moment and who has been remanded in goal
- **How is society supporting our youth if drugs are a huge part of youth??**

POSITIVES

- Max still occasionally plays soccer
- he telephoned his mother from hospital on Mother's Day to wish her a happy Mother's Day

POSSIBLE ANSWERS??

- mandatory rehabilitation - 6-12 months - where life skills; self-esteem classes; work skills, social skills and other relevant skills are taught/retaught
- goal
- 'getting off' totally
- Government to take responsibility for drug abuse in our society as this will decrease
 - crime eg break-and-enters, fraud, possession of needles, armed hold-ups
 - drug-related violence
 - disintegration of family life

Drug Abuse . . . How are we handling it?

At the age of 15 Tom (fictitious name) started smoking marijuana which he smoked outside of the home.

He started dealing at the age of 18 at which time he had become drug dependent on marijuana. He dealt from home and his parents' place of work.

His father was extremely shocked one morning when he found approx. \$800 worth of marijuana together with \$1,000 cash in his room. Father removed the marijuana and cash. Tom went to his parents' workplace extremely aggravated and threatened to slit the throat of the family dog if the dope and cash were not returned to him.

Tom purchased his first car from proceeds of marijuana sales. Parents thought Tom had saved the money from his salary.

Tom advanced to LSD and was then introduced to heroin by a very good friend who offered it free of charge. The friend was a heroin addict and dealt, to sustain his own addiction.

How drug abuse affects Family Relationships

- Parents began to mistrust Tom at work and at home 2 years ago and now no longer trust him at all
- Tom's user friends verbally abused Tom's 2 younger brothers consistently in the home
- Younger brothers saw marijuana, needles, bongs, prescription drugs, heroin, cash from drug sales
- Younger brothers were threatened by Tom and his user friends
- Youngest brother who is 12 has a curious personality which has resulted in a wide knowledge of drug-related activity
- parents have been stunned that their son has become a user, despite their education to all their children on the affects/dangers of drugs
- siblings have fear of Tom's behaviour towards them, eg Tom can be aggressive and overbearing
- situation has taken over the parents' lives, both at home and at work

- parents are constantly in fear of Tom’s state when he returns home from wherever eg
 - is he straight?
 - what has he taken?
 - what amounts has he taken?
 - will he be alright?
 - does an ambulance need to be called?
 - will he just sleep it off?
 - how many times will we need to get up to him during the night to check his pulse and blood pressure?
- Parents have to hide wallets, mobile phones and handbags in their locked car. Car keys are taken to bed with them.
- Mother had to transport Tom to “Community Service” at 6.00 each morning once a week, for an intermittent period of 12 months, as a result of the robbery with assault charge. Tom was often under the influence of heroin and had no desire to attend “Community Service” so this proved a very difficult task for his mother.
- Mother spent 40th birthday at a Drug and Alcohol Clinic as Tom wanted to detox from heroin. (Mother was horrified at the amount of users leaving the clinic after having collected new needles every minute of her 2-hour stay there). Tom, after seeing the doctor, left the clinic with 20 needles in his pocket (mother found out later).
- parents describes last few years as
 - horrendous
 - shocking
 - heartbreaking
 - incredulous
 - police
 - trying to hide the situation from family and friends as you do not want them judging Tom or themselves
 - incredibly hard time coming to terms with the fact that Tom does not have a conscience when it comes to his criminal activities
- Tom’s mother has recently told her mother about Tom’s addiction. The grandmother has shown support to her daughter but asked why she was not told sooner and is angry at Tom for what he has done to his mother.
- Tom has recently spent 4 weeks at the Arthur Gorrie Remand Centre for fraud of prescription drugs, theft of restricted drugs, failure to dispose of a used syringe and attempted suicide. His mother had a warrant for Tom to have a Mental Health assessment. Unfortunately, there were no beds available in the Public Health System and Tom had to return home without being assessed. (He is on a high-priority list for a bed in mandatory rehabilitation.)

Due to the warrant Tom was remanded until a Court appearance in June. Thankfully the Magistrate has ordered mandatory rehabilitation (whereby Tom cannot leave and cannot be discharged), otherwise Tom is in breach of bail and will be returned to remand until his next Court appearance in August.

In the meantime the parents are extremely anxious that Tom may regress back to the drug-induced world.

Parents now feel they cannot and will not protect their son any more. He has to be responsible for his own actions, now that he is aware of the consequences.

How drug abuse affects crime, violence and law enforcement

- Tom hire-purchased a \$17,000 car (second car) with parents' as guarantors. Parents have made all payments in relation to this car, eg monthly repayments, insurance, registration, insurance excesses from accidents caused by the influence of heroin
- Parents paid \$3,600 to defend Tom against charges of robbery with assault
- Tom has cost his parents an approximate total of \$30,000
- Tom has stolen from the family home on many occasions, including jewellery (some of which mother has repurchased from cash converters); mother's ATM Card to the value of \$1,000; CD player; CD's; power tools; cameras; binoculars; play stations; intendos; bicycles etc.
- Whilst under the influence of valium, Tom became very agitated and restless and was physical with his father after his father asked him not to smoke in the house. Tom nevertheless lit the cigarette and a family physical fight occurred. Tom called the Police to lay charges against his father. The Police arrived and told him the Magistrate would throw it out of Court as it was his father's home. Tom left the house and obtained further prescription drugs.
- There has been one other similar experience which was most upsetting for family members. This occurred following father's questioning of type of drugs he had taken.
- Tom has been charged with the above offences but has not been convicted. Tom has an unhealthy attitude towards the Police.

How drug abuse affects road trauma

- Tom has driven 50 km under the heavy influence of drugs where the passengers have been scared for their lives and have forced Tom to leave the car on the side of the road
- Tom has driven from work, whilst under the influence of heroin, and had an accident in which a couple in the other vehicle were injured
- On New Years' Day Tom drove from home to Goodna where there are known drug dealers living. Tom had a hit of heroin and on his way home, drove into a ditch and wrote off the front of the car. Parents 'picked up' tab again.

How drug abuse affects workplace safety and productivity

- Tom began to fall asleep at the computer at work
- He went missing for lengthy periods of time while supposedly collecting mail, and performing other work errands. He in fact was collecting and using drugs.
- He was driving in work time whilst under the influence of heroin
- Tom had 2 accidents in his car during work time due to heroin use
- Tom stole stock from the family business to support his habit to the value of approx \$9,000
- Family business had a major break-in which amounted to approx \$17,000. Some stock was found in a known drug dealer's home. This affected the family business cash flow severely.

How drug abuse affects health care costs

This has not been an issue as the public system has been utilised. However, the family does not have ambulance cover.

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

- Total lack of any support (including community, State and Federal Government) for drug addicts and their families.
- Drug addicts have no control over their behaviour and need to have mandatory rehabilitation. If this means behind bars for a certain amount of time, so be it.

- Families, neighbours and the community at large are affected by what the drug addict is doing, ie break and enters, family breakdowns.
- Where is our youth heading – drugs are playing such a big part in society. How many professionals/dedicated workers are we likely to have in the future when a large percentage are using drugs.
- Why are Cash Converters accepting stolen goods from obvious young drug users? Why are they not asking for receipts for proof of purchase?
- How is society supporting our youth if drugs are a huge part of youth??