

## Not My Choice!

*By Mary Jane McCormick*

To say anything about the opioid epidemic in this country only seems to diminish the problem. I have but a cursory knowledge of its depth and breath. But I do know the number of deaths attributed to these drugs each year is staggering.

What I do reflect on is my 12 years of experience with drug and alcohol recovery in the 1990's. My knowledge may be outdated, but the compassion for those caught in the grip of addiction is very much alive.

The hair on the back of my neck stands straight up when I hear things like: "It's just a lack of will power. Why can't that person put the 'plug in the jug' and just quit drinking? Why can't that 'druggo' just stop using?"

For too many people, addiction is not viewed as a disease.

You don't hear people saying, "Why doesn't that diabetic just lay off the sugar?" I have never heard someone say to a person with dementia or Alzheimer's, "Why don't you just try to remember?"

I do hope we are moving closer to decriminalizing the use of opioids and accept that addiction is a disease. Alcoholics Anonymous calls it a disease of body, mind and soul. At some point, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual changes eventually remove choice. The addict is no longer choosing to use—the capacity for deciding NOT to use has been eclipsed. Pushing the judgment of will power is typically a sign of ignorance of this disease.

At this point, one intervention after another is required to bring a person back to even a modicum of choosing recovery over choosing the drug. Too many people never reach this turning point. And if they do, the chances of relapse are sky high.

It is difficult for me to be optimistic. The drugs on the market today are not only more affordable, they are readily available.

I would guess that over 50% of us in this room have been touched personally by this disease of addiction. It continues to tear apart relationships and families. What may seem like 'giving up' on a person is at times the best decision.

Thank you for allowing me to rant and rave. I realize this writing is mostly for myself. My compassion needs to stay focused on hearing the person caught in this vicious cycle... THIS IS NOT MY CHOICE!