



**Jul 26, 2010**

## **The struggle against addiction**

By JORDAN CRAVENS

staff writer

When his drug use was at its height, "John," 42, of Findlay, spent \$300 every two days on heroin and painkillers.

He started out abusing alcohol and marijuana, and graduated to cocaine, and later to highly addictive and potentially fatal opiates.

First, he snorted the heroin.

"Then it got to where I was snorting it and I couldn't feel it," John said.

Next, he started to shoot heroin into his body with a syringe because it was a better high, he said.

He used more and more. Becoming increasingly desperate for his fixes, he stole money from his employer. His boss caught him, but charges were not pursued.

He tried to quit cold turkey.

It worked for a while. But then he got hooked on pain pills. He tried to quit several times, but relapsed.

Withdrawal was always his biggest fear.

"It's like having the worst flu you ever had multiplied by 100," he said.

Eventually, John had enough.

He started treatment at Anhedonia, a Findlay clinic that describes itself as a doctor's office for opiate addicts. He went through the program and eventually was weaned off Suboxone, a transitional drug used by Anhedonia to help patients end their addiction.

He completed treatment and seemed to be on the right track, but felt himself slipping in February.

"It was like I could feel the addiction tapping on my shoulder," he said.

In a weak moment, he took 20 pain pills and planned to blow a paycheck on more drugs. But, before he could do it, he went back to Anhedonia.

"If I hadn't come back here (Anhedonia), I would have gone back to heroin because it's so cheap," he said.

"Debbie," 42, of Fostoria, a single parent without child support, pushed herself to work to provide for her family.

Taking painkillers was part of getting through the day.

She took pain pills following back and neck surgeries in the late 1990s. Eventually, she was hooked.

"You have got to have more and more and more for your body to stay at that consistent level," she said.

"I guess I viewed myself in a different class for awhile. The doctor was giving the prescriptions to me so I told myself, 'I'm legal.'"

But now, "I don't view myself as any different than a heroin addict. In my eyes, I still had to have the drugs in my everyday life," she said.

She longed to be able to enjoy life again.

"On the painkillers, I was numb and didn't feel anything. I want to be able to enjoy my kids and grandkids," Debbie said, "and to not wake up each day wondering where I am going to get my next pill."

"Chris," 37, of North Baltimore, said, "When you are using, that's what everything is about," scoring drugs.

Working in a factory, Chris said there were always drugs to be had.

"If you said you had back pain, there is going to be somebody who has some sort of opiate," he said.

He recalled spending an hour or two daily after his shift in search of his next fix.

Going without drugs was the worst, he said. During withdrawal, his body would ache, he would have severe diarrhea and the shakes.

"Every muscle in your body tightens up and you can't move," he said.

"John," "Chris," and "Debbie," whose names have been changed for this article, were getting treatment at Anhedonia several months ago.

"John" is still being treated at Anhedonia.

"Debbie" has been off Suboxone for several months and is "doing great," according to Andy Shaferly, a registered nurse there.

"Chris" is still coming to Anhedonia and has started to decrease his Suboxone dosage, she said.

Editor's Note: The names of people in this story have been changed, but their ages and hometowns have not.

Cravens: 419-427-8422,

[jordancravens@thecourier.com](mailto:jordancravens@thecourier.com)

Tuesday: Northwestern Ohio high school students are abusing heroin and pain pills. Also, police and prosecutors have joined forces to combat drugs.

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**The Findlay Publishing Company**

P.O. Box 609

Findlay, OH 45839-0609

Phone: (419) 422-5151

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