

Loss and recovery with Oxy addiction

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Hugo Paredes has watched six of his friends from Torrey Pines High School's class of 2002 die from overdosing on OxyContin or heroin. After seeing what drugs did to his friends,

Paredes said he knows he is lucky. Paredes, 24, is a recovering alcoholic. By July, he will have been sober for two years, besting a drinking habit he acquired in eighth grade.

As a Torrey Pines student, Paredes said he sold Vicodin to his classmates. At the time it was the "popular" drug and teens took 10 to 15 pills at a time to get high. In 2002, marijuana and cocaine were also popular at school, Paredes said.

He is shocked now when in conversation with current students he learns that marijuana is now considered next to nothing and drinking alcohol is likened to drinking soda. He now hears stories of teens shooting up heroin in the canyons or students going to school high on either OxyContin or ecstasy.

Paredes often interacts with Torrey Pines students headed for school dances through his company Rockstar Limo. "I get really angry when I hear people are using Oxy. It really kills me," Paredes said. "I know what the price of OxyContin is and it's death. I've seen my friend be lowered into the ground, open casket- it was the scariest thing ever."

The open casket Paredes referred to was Cyrus Moinzadeh's. The 23-year-old died in 2007. Paredes and Cyrus' family made a video of that open casket funeral and posted it on YouTube hoping teens and parents would see it. "Parents at Torrey Pines still want to close their eyes and act like they don't hear it," Paredes said. "It makes me very sad."

The power of a pill

The OxyContin trend is one the San Dieguito Union School District saw coming, said Joseph Olesky, the district's substance abuse counselor.

The National Institute of Drug Abuse yearly lists the top three drug trends among youth--alcohol and marijuana haven't budged in years as the top two, he said, but the third most prevalent has alternated. A few years ago it was cocaine and methamphetamine; now prescription drugs have taken over, Olesky said.



Olesky said he believes many that teens will start using drugs like Vicodin, Percocet or Demerol because they feel they can control it. As they combine the drugs with alcohol, they build a tolerance and often move to Oxy, he said.

"It made me feel like a God, like I was all powerful," said Joe Marcuzzo, 20, a client at the La Jolla Recovery Center who became addicted to Oxy at 16. Marcuzzo said he only tried Oxy once before he was hooked.

Olesky said many have to start taking two pills a day just to avoid withdrawal symptoms that include runny noses, sweating, vomiting and diarrhea.

Once the habit becomes too expensive, Olesky said many turn to heroin. While Oxy generally costs between \$60 and \$80 a pill, heroin is almost the same high, and \$10 a gram buys enough to shoot up twice a day.

Kicking the habit

Kiyani Yazdani, Cyrus' mother, believes it takes a year in treatment to truly kick the Oxy habit. She said she believes Oxy addicts need to get completely away from the lifestyle. Traditional rehabilitation programs typically last for 28 to 30 days.

Then patients often turn to longer-term solutions such as the La Jolla Recovery Center for further help. Barrett Hammond, co-owner of La Jolla Recovery, said he sees the most success when patients stay for six to eight months.

Their highly structured program includes meditation, workouts, healthy eating, community service projects and work with job counselors to plan for the next step. "It's learning how to live life on life's terms without using drugs or alcohol to cope," Hammond said.

Co-owner Danny Simons said the center creates a sense of community, with six inhabitants at a time who really want to be sober and use peer pressure to encourage one another. Marcuzzo said this sense of community has helped him greatly. He has been sober since Jan. 6.

Reaching out

To keep Cyrus' memory alive, Yazdani started the CyMo Foundation, which works with La Jolla Recovery to offer a patient scholarship. The foundation also makes donations to Set Free Ministries in El Cajon, an organization that helps drug addicts and their families.

Paredes often works with the foundation as well. Part of his plan as a recovering addict is to help others. In August, for Cyrus' birthday, CyMo will organize a backpack drive for the children at Set Free.

Yazdani is now working to build Cyrus' legacy, she said, knowing in her heart that it should be the other way around. "If I knew what I know now, I would've tied him to myself and never let him leave my side," Yazdani said.

