

I am Dakota and am only using my first name as I prefer to remain anonymous. I suffer from Opiate Use Disorder and have been in and out of recovery for ten years now. I have seen how the risks of heroin have changed over this time span. The last few years have been the ones in which I have seen most of my friends or people I have known, die due to the rise of Fentanyl. Never during the first few years of my disease was the stark reality of how easily you could be there one day and gone the next, so evident. It wasn't something you that you did not come across, or hear about, you were aware of the risks, but, not the imminent threat. It is a fact that in the last several years more and more people have been dying due to overdoses of heroin laced with fentanyl. Almost all Heroin is now laced with Fentanyl.

When I first started using, treatment was difficult to find, but now it's much harder, all with the constant looming threat that your next needed hit is pretty likely to be your last breath. I believe the situation is to the point in which, even while trying to increase access of real treatment; not just maintenance, something has to be done to stop the tide of bodies. Multiple methods of maintenance treatments are already effective in keeping people alive as we saw in Chittenden County this year where they have embraced harm reduction techniques like not arresting or prosecuting for illicit buprenorphine. While highly regulated, the possibility of someone sneaking their medication out of a clinic, or selling their own take home or doctor ordered prescriptions does exist, when someone does that, they would have used fentanyl laced heroin anyways and whomever they sold it to is choosing a life saving treatment instead of fentanyl laced heroin.

Even just finding the resources to utilize medically assisted treatment while at absolute bottom and ready for treatment is difficult, even just making the choice to take Buprenorphine instead of Heroin is really difficult. At times it is all one can do to switch right then and there when you are ready to Buprenorphine and then that gives you the strength and clarity to find a prescribing doctor and take the steps that are often high barriers in most parts of the state and to try again at recovery..

I feel that even though people are buying what is now an illegal drug off the street, those people who are trying to manage and stay well enough to figure out how to start to get sober should be treated more as a medical and social issue than a moral failing on their part. There is no question that the decriminalizing of maintenance drugs such as suboxone/buprenorphine, at least puts a throttle to an increasing death toll. I figure at least keeping people alive while we try to help them, or giving folks the ability to help them is a good start. I strongly encourage you to pass H.162 and give more Vermonters a chance at surviving this disease..