RETHINKING THE NATURE OF OPIATE ADDICTION

Anthony M Daniels

Former Consultant Psychiatrist, West Midlands Poisons Unit, City Hospital, Birmingham and Winson Green Prison, Birmingham, UK
OPIATE ADDICTION

‘Ground-breaking discoveries about the brain have revolutionized our understanding of drug addiction, enabling us to respond effectively to the problem’

Dr Nora Volkow, National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2008
OPIOID-RELATED FATALITIES

US Centre for Disease Control, 2014

- 28,647 deaths ‘associated’ with opioid use
  - 18,893 prescription opioids
  - 10,544 heroin
OPIOID-RELATED FATALITIES

Opioid analgesics

Heroin
OPIATE ADDICTION

- ‘Ground-breaking discoveries …… enabling us to respond effectively to the problem’

  Dr Nora Volkow, 2008

- ‘…..Where ignorance is bliss ‘Tis folly to be wise’

  Thomas Gray, 1742
A LITTLE LEARNING…..

‘A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not, the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again’

Alexander Pope, 1711
OPIATE ADDICTION: PRESCRIBING

- Patients given strong opioids for post operative or cancer pain do not become addicted.

- The same is not true of patients with chronic pain conditions.

- Different patient populations respond to opiates in different ways and different approaches to prescribing are necessary.
OPIATE ADDICTION: PSYCHOLOGY

- Addiction to opiates is more related to personality and psychological circumstances than to addictive qualities of the drugs.

  *Lawrence Kolb 1911-2006*

- ‘Ground-breaking discoveries …… enabling us to respond effectively to the problem’

  *Dr Nora Volkow, 2008*
DEFINITION OF ADDICTION

\[\ldots \text{a chronic, relapsing brain disease...}\]
US FATALITIES

- Opioid-related deaths 2000-2014
- Homicides 2000-2014
- Military losses during Gulf, Afghanistan, Vietnam and Korean wars
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

- Is not solely the result of a physiological process
- Does not ‘just happen’ to people!
- Is not only the result of what people do but also what they want
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

● ‘The abuse liability of heroin is... amply demonstrated in the astonishingly brief time-lag between initial use and ... dependent use....

● ... where this lag-time has been reported, the average .... was only around 18 months’

The Life of the Heroin User
Prof Shane Darke
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

- Implausible that an individual taking heroin for 18 months is unaware of the consequences
- Heroin addiction is sought after
- It does not 'just happen'
HOOKED BY HEROIN
or HOOKED THE HEROIN?
THE WRONG CROWD

● **AD**: So how did you come to be addicted to heroin?

● **Addict**: Well doctor, I just fell in with the wrong crowd

● **AD**: It’s strange…I have met hundreds of people who have fallen in with the wrong crowd but I have never met any member of the wrong crowd itself
INTRAVENTOUS HEROIN USE: A CHOICE

- ‘The move to injecting is a major landmark…

- To inject drugs into a vein is a process that must be learnt…

- The initial injection most commonly occurs…with established [drug-addicted] friends… who guide and initiate’

*The Life of the Heroin User*

*Prof Shane Darke*
INTRAVENOUS HEROIN USE: A CHOICE

- There is a determination on the part of a person to become a drug addict.

- Addiction is not something that creeps up on him/her unawares.
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

● ‘The initial decision to take drugs is mostly voluntary

● However, when addiction takes over, a person’s *ability to exert self-control can become seriously impaired*’

*National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014*
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

- ‘A user who has to demonstrate heroin abstinence to a court through regular urinalysis may be highly motivated to undertake, and comply with, such treatment. For the most typical heroin user, however, strong external motivations are often lacking’

The Life of the Heroin User
Prof Shane Darke
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

- Regular compliance with urinalysis is hardly consistent with a seriously impaired ability to exert self-control.
- Without the constraints of a court’s demands a heroin user has no reason to exert self-control.
VIETNAM VETERANS' RAPID RECOVERY FROM HEROIN ADDICTION: A FLUKE OR NORMAL EXPECTATION?

- 40% veterans had taken heroin in Vietnam
- Within 1 year of return, only 5% of those addicted in Vietnam were still addicted
- At 3 years, only 12% of those addicted in Vietnam had been addicted at any time in the 3 years since return

Robbins LN. Addiction 1993; 88: 1041 -1054
VIETNAM VETERANS' RAPID RECOVERY FROM HEROIN ADDICTION: A FLUKE OR NORMAL EXPECTATION?

- Only 1/3 addicted in Vietnam received even simple detoxification while in service

- <2% who used narcotics in Vietnam went into drug abuse treatment after return

Robbins LN. Addiction 1993; 88: 1041 -1054
OPIATE ADDICTION: A CHOICE?

- ‘Once the move into heroin occurs, the risk of a lifetime of dependence is extraordinarily high. Once dependence develops the person has effectively lost control over their drug use. We are thus not speaking of a ‘life choice’

The Life of the Heroin User
Prof Shane Darke
OPIATE ADDICTION: CONCLUSIONS

● ‘The Darke-National Institute of Drug Abuse view is predominant, and one of the factors that has led to the current epidemic of opioid deaths in the United States and elsewhere’

Anthony Daniels, 2016
OPIATE ADDICTION: CONCLUSIONS

- ‘Addiction is not predominantly, let alone exclusively, a chronic relapsing brain disorder, unless the whole of human life is a chronic relapsing brain disorder’

  Anthony Daniels, 2016
FURTHER READING

1. Romancing Opiates: Pharmacological Lies and the Addiction Bureaucracy
   By Theodore Dalrymple

2. Junk Medicine: Doctors, Lies and the Addiction Bureaucracy
   By Theodore Dalrymple