

My Story
A Pharmacist in Recovery

I'm no drug addict or alcoholic! This can't be true. How did I end up on a detox unit at a treatment center?

I began to have migraines while attending pharmacy school. They were manageable with a dose or two of Fioricet here and there. Several years later I had a job specialty pharmacy working only Monday through Friday during the daytime. I was the Branch Supervisor for our location. The pressure began to mount when it was announced that our company would strive to obtain Joint Commission Accreditation. I have always been a perfectionist so needless to say there was a huge amount of stress over the next year in preparation. My headaches began to increase in frequency and severity over that year. I was working so many hours I lost track of when I took my last dose of Fioricet. I knew I was taking too many during the day but by this time I didn't care. About four months before the Joint Commission came to our facility a pharmacy colleague stopped my early refills of Fioricet. This caused severe withdrawal symptoms...I missed several work days over the next few months.

My narcotic use escalated because I didn't want to go through the withdrawal, I had to be a work. To keep going I began to reach inside a stock bottle of Lortab at my pharmacy. Nobody would know. After all, I was just taking 2-3 tablets out at a time. I was able to keep working but lost 30 pounds in three months. My husband and family were really worried about my weight loss. I just blamed my stressful job.

One morning I came into the office and a woman was there from the corporate Regulatory department. She stated she was there to do a "random" audit. My heart began to beat rapidly as I knew I would probably be caught diverting from the pharmacy. One year later my technician told me she had turned me in. I thanked her for that much to her amazement. I told her it probably saved my life.

My employees and I were driven to a local lab to give urine samples. I still didn't confess but I did resign immediately while the office was closed. I knew I would be fired and thought the DEA and/or the police would be looking for me. My husband lovingly stayed by my side through everything. On the advice of an attorney I saw my family doctor and told him what I had done. He was so wonderful to me and advised me to see a psychiatrist who specializes in Addiction medicine. I was referred to a treatment center that specializes in treating health care professionals. The typical length of stay is three months. My illness is like having cancer or diabetes. There is no cure. But it is manageable as long as I keep working in my recovery program.

Just before I left for treatment I had contacted my Department Manager about a job not knowing that I would be gone 3 months. Needless to say I had to call him and tell him I wouldn't be back for a while. He was so caring and said I would have a job when I got home and that he would pray for me. Upon discharge from rehab I had to sign a 5 year contract with the Pharmacist Recovery Network in this state. I would be required to give random urine screens, go to several AA or NA meetings each week and provide monthly reports on my progress. We also have a state wide meeting once a month to share in recovery and support each other. The director of PRN works closely with our Board of Pharmacy to see that we get back to work when we are ready and not before. Luckily my previous employer did not turn me in to the Board so my license was in tact.

Those of us in the PRN program are the safest pharmacists to hire because of our urine screens. I have also learned to manage stress a lot better. I have a very spiritual program involving my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God. It has been two years since my discharge and life is good. I work part-time to minimize job burn-out and to keep up with my recovery program. I know that relapse can be deadly as I have lost two friends (physicians) to this disease.

Addiction is not a case of me being a horrible drug addict. I will always need my 12-step program to stay clean and sober. I am so grateful to God for my family, friends and my Department Manager who are supporting me throughout my recovery.