



Residential Drug Treatment Programs ?Reluctantly? Switching to Medication-Assisted Methods

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Some drug rehab facilities that offer residential treatment are reluctantly switching from abstinence-focused programs to medication-assisted methods because of the current opioid epidemic affecting the country. In terms of rehabilitation, there are two warring factions that represent two very different approaches to addiction treatment: abstinence vs. medication.

But those facilities specializing in abstinence are reluctantly evolving and slowly implementing FDA-approved medications into their treatment programs. JourneyPure at the River, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, is one such facility.

JourneyPure at the River draws hundreds of patients every month seeking treatment for opioid addiction and other drugs. The facility offers a variety of treatment methods, dividing their days between therapy sessions, songwriting, equine therapy, and climbing through a treetop ropes course. After dinner, patients go through 12-step meetings.

This is a common regimen at residential treatment programs, and many other facilities offer similar

approaches. But because the opioid epidemic is still persisting, rehab facilities like JourneyPure is evolving, despite their own reluctance.

Medications have been proven to help blunt the torturous withdrawal symptoms that drug-dependent individuals eventually go through as their body detoxifies from the substance. There are a few FDA-approved medications that have allowed drug rehab facilities to drastically lower the rate of overdose-related deaths.

There is substantial evidence backing this approach, which is known to work best when used in tandem with therapy.

However, residential rehab facilities like JourneyPure are hesitant to incorporate these drugs into their own programs because these medications are opioids themselves. Many people believe that taking drugs to quit drugs is not a real recovery.

Addiction experts agree that such resistance is obstructing efforts to reduce overdose deaths, which is ultimately another barrier that is enabling the opioid crisis. There is a social stigma associated with addiction that it is purely a moral failure, rather than a medical condition.

It does not help that drug rehab, in general, is quite expensive and many people go in debt trying to pay for repeated stints in residential rehab. "I'm watching the dominoes fall on our industry," said David Perez, JourneyPure at the River's new chief executive, who has helped lead the push toward using more medication-assisted treatment. "People are dying, and we are feeling more and more impotent to stop it. That is what's shifting beliefs, more than anything."

In 2017, more than 70,000 people in the US died of overdoses, and opioids were the leading cause. On the contrary, 49 percent of the nearly 3,000 residential programs that treat opioid addiction still don't use any of the medications proven to save lives.

Still, this 49 percent is actually an increase over 2016, when 58 percent weren't using any medications for addiction treatment.

Some patients themselves are yet to be won over by the strong evidence for medication-assisted treatment. Many addicted individuals feel guilty over taking medications to control the effects of drug abuse. They feel like they are cheating the program. Because of this, doctors should strive to reassure their patients of the safety of these medications; it might save their life.

A new approach for JourneyPure: JourneyPure and other residential treatment programs use medications like naltrexone because it is not an opioid. It works by blocking the brain's opioid receptors, preventing any

high in patients who try to use opioids while on it.

JourneyPure usually offers patients an initial shot near the end of their stay. They also give patients an option of returning monthly for more. JourneyPure has also decided to let residential patients take buprenorphine, also known as Suboxone, depending on their condition.

While treatment programs that offer songwriting, meditation, and equine therapy can also be effective, they work best when used with medication-assisted therapy. If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, look for a drug rehab facility nearby and learn more about residential treatment options. The journey towards sobriety starts today at Rehab Near Me.

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