



Isn't it time for your child to get vaccinated?



View the CDC recommendations

Help protect your child with Menactra vaccine

Opinion

Home » News » Opinion

Tools

TEXT SIZE AA - +

print	Yahoo! Buzz	Newsvine
e-mail	reddit	Digg it
	Delicious	Technorati
	facebook	Mixx

# Close addiction treatment gap

By Lisa Molet-Smith

Posted: Aug. 31, 2009

My recovery from drug addiction began with a single step: On New Year's Eve 1997, I stepped off the porch of a Milwaukee drug house, determined, after 10 years of destructive addiction, to get well. Casual drinking and recreational drug use had snowballed, and my life had spiraled into crime, homelessness and prostitution. Unsure of my ability to stay clean, I no longer wanted to live.

That first step took me to a soup kitchen, a second step to a downtown homeless shelter, where I was a regular guest. Stabilized by the shelter's staff, I reached out to Meta House, a Milwaukee addiction treatment center that addresses the unique recovery needs of women. At the time, I had nothing - no money, no insurance, no ability to pay - but an overwhelming desire to get well.

My story ends happily: During an eight-month stay at Meta House, I received extensive treatment to overcome my addiction, learning how to live life clean and sober for the first time in a decade. That was nearly 12 years ago. Since then, I have become a two-time college graduate, a child-care teacher and a volunteer working with other women suffering from an addiction.

September is National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, an opportunity for those of us suffering from an addiction to tell of our successes and struggles, testify to the benefits of treatment and fight the misinformation that stigmatizes and marginalizes us.

Three simple yet powerful truths inform our efforts:

- Addiction is a chronic, relapse-prone disease - not a lack of willpower, not a personal weakness - that changes brain chemistry, creating a craving for drugs or alcohol as strong as for food or water. The American Medical Association and the National Institutes of Health recognize addiction as a disease.

- Treatment works to counteract addiction's powerful effects and help patients regain control of their lives. For the past 30 years, federally sponsored research has repeatedly confirmed treatment's effectiveness.

- Addiction treatment is inaccessible for far too many - more than 82,000 people in Milwaukee County alone, and nine out of every 10 nationally. Barriers include lack of insurance (at last count, 500,000 in Wisconsin are uninsured), insurance companies that routinely deny and artificially limit treatment and outdated policies and laws that keep people from accessing help.

This treatment gap has powerful consequences: Untreated drug and alcohol abuse costs \$500 billion a year in health care expenditures, lost productivity and related crime, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and it contributes to the death of more than 100,000 Americans a year. In Wisconsin, addictions are the fourth-leading cause of death.

We'd never tolerate denying life-saving treatment to 90% of people suffering from Alzheimer's, diabetes or breast cancer, so why do we tolerate it for addiction? It's long past time to close the gap. We'll save money - \$7 for every \$1 invested in treatment, conservatively - and, more important, we'll save lives.

Expansion of health insurance to all is a first step. A second step is ensuring that insurers that provide addiction treatment do so at its fullest levels, with no artificial limits. A third step is making the necessary improvements to the treatment delivery system - opening up enough beds and providing treatment when and where it is sought - so that it's efficient and effective for everyone.

The steps one takes to get treatment for addiction can be life-changing. When I took a step off of that front porch, I was blessed that Meta House was there to help me. We must remove the barriers so that when others take their first steps, treatment will be available to help them.

Lisa Molet-Smith is a Milwaukee child-care teacher and recovery advocate.

### TOP STORIES

Audit slaps county for failing to recycle for years

Summer's cold shoulder

Study fingers state for Milwaukee's financial woes

Gas prices drop, but so will Labor Day travel, AAA says

West Allis proposal ties employee raises to city revenue

### MORE NEWS

Summer's cold shoulder

Study fingers state for Milwaukee's financial woes

Doyle, Barrett say Milwaukee schools need radical change

West Allis proposal ties employee raises to city revenue

Sensenbrenner says prostate cancer won't slow him down

Can SeniorCare serve as a model?

Wait till you see my new bundle of joy

Private fortune, public cash

advertisement

Obituaries

Powered by Legacy.com

Powered by Legacy.com

### Most Popular - News

#### most read e-mailed

Study fingers state for Milwaukee's financial woes

Summer's cold shoulder

Wait till you see my new bundle of joy

Gas prices drop, but so will Labor Day travel, AAA says

West Allis proposal ties employee raises to city revenue

more most popular content...



#### E-mail Newsletter

The latest local news delivered to your inbox Monday-Friday during the 2 p.m. hour.

enter your e-mail address

Sign Up Now!

Enter your e-mail address above and click "Sign Up Now!" to begin receiving your e-mail newsletter

Login or Register to manage all your newsletter preferences.

#### Sponsored Links

Look who is watching you

Signup for a free trial. howchangedmylife.com