

Case 1

I saw this 32 year old man because of his dependence on heroin. He stated that he was in a motor vehicle accident (not his fault) that caused a severe whiplash neck injury and a severe shoulder muscle sprain. He was put on Oxycodone by his family physician for the severe pain. 10 months after the accident, having been treated with physiotherapy and massage and some decrease in his dose of Oxycodone, he stated his family physician told him his injury had healed and that he no longer needed the Oxycodone. It was discontinued and he noted an extreme increase in his pain that over the counter remedies would not relieve.

He stated that in desperation he went to look for pain relief on the street and was introduced to heroin. He came for help because he wanted to discontinue the heroin and because he did not know what he would do without it to alleviate the pain.

Of importance the MVA had interfered with what was a promising career as a chef. He had been in the process of getting a good contract with a major hotel because of his skill when the MVA occurred. He was depressed about this and worried he had lost his window of opportunity.

He had no prior history of substance abuse or dependence.

I reviewed with him the withdrawal symptoms of discontinuing opioids and explained that one of the main symptoms of withdrawal is pain that feels like the pain from the injury but is really withdrawal pain. He stated he did not remember being warned about this. I reviewed with him the sensitivity of the opioid receptors after discontinuing opioids and that this would gradually decrease over the next 3 to 6 months. **I emphasized that his injury had actually healed.**

Once he fully understood this, he was able with help to stop the heroin and not resume opioids. When I saw him 3 months later, he was doing well and his neck and shoulder symptoms from the withdrawal were almost resolved. He was gradually resuming all his activities.