

Our readers write

Addiction Recovery Month

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September is National Alcohol & Drug Addiction Recovery Month. Across the country, people in recovery will be celebrating their sobriety with rallies, block parties, walks and other events.

While it is important to acknowledge and exalt those in recovery, it is also important to recognize those who are still struggling with addiction. As attorneys with Addiction Recovery Legal Services, we have worked with thousands of families coping with substance abuse. The stories of our clients are those who now celebrate recovery. These stories all too common within South Florida's drug culture, yet are also very important to share as examples of success.

In fact, it may be more important than ever to pay close attention to substance abuse in the region, where recent data demonstrates alarming trends involving abuse of prescription pain killers. According to a Florida Medical Examiners Commission report, both Palm Beach and Broward counties experienced a 20% rise in fatal overdoses involving oxycodone and a 40% rise in overdoses involving benzodiazepines (such as Xanax) from 2007 to 2008. In Broward County, the rate of overdoses due to prescription pain killers rose at a rate more than double that of the state overall.

This is due in part to the proliferation of pain clinics — often referred to as “pill mills” — in the region. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the top 25 sellers of prescription pain medication in the U.S. from January through June 2008 operated in Florida. Broward County held 68% of the top practitioners and 69.4% of the total units dispensed. To mitigate the problem, local communities such as Dania Beach and Delray Beach are seeking to regulate pain clinics. Similarly, Gov. Charlie Crist signed legislation in June to regulate pain clinics and establish a statewide prescription drug monitoring program.

There are few who understand the ramifications of substance

abuse better than an addict's family members and friends, who often watch helplessly as their loved ones' lives spiral out of control. They beg the addict to stop using or to seek treatment, but their requests go unheeded. Unfortunately, some family members and friends abandon efforts to seek assistance for a loved one, convinced that their efforts are futile.

Fortunately there is a legal remedy to assist substance abusers, one that may not be widely known. Under the Florida Marchman Act, families and friends can confidentially petition the court to help them address a loved one's substance abuse problem. The court can then issue an order that requires the impaired individual to enter into a court-supervised and monitored, drug and alcohol intervention, assessment, stabilization and/or treatment.

The key to the Marchman Act's effectiveness is that an impaired individual must comply with the court order, even if he or she has refused to seek help in the past or has sought treatment that proved to be unsuccessful. Those who do not follow court orders are subject to court sanctions and punishment, including jail time. Even for those who are uncertain about the extent of a loved one's problem, the Marchman Act can be an effective tool because it can identify a problem before addiction fully manifests itself, or the addiction problem leads to far more serious legal consequences, such as an arrest for drug possession, distribution or trafficking.

Since the law was enacted in 1993, we have handled thousands of Marchman Act cases, working with individuals seeking help for a loved one. With the help of the Marchman Act, we have watched substance abusers overcome denial and take that all-important first step on the road to recovery.

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