

IT'S ABOUT PAIN

The story of Tim

Tim's name isn't Tim, but his story illustrates what's happened to our 531 chronic pain patients.

Tim, now 55 years old, weighed 750 pounds when he underwent Roux en Y bariatric surgery in Seattle about 25 years ago. He's lost almost 500 pounds, but carrying that ½ ton every day for 10+ years has drastically injured his feet, ankles, knees, hips, back, and neck. His chronic pain was initially treated with high dose oxycodone, but it made him goofy and angry. His doctor in Seattle then switched him to methadone, high dose, and he's led an essentially normal life since then, when he moved to Longview.

But taking 16 methadone pills a day is the equivalent of 480 mg of morphine, far above the more common dose limit of 30 mg of methadone (90 of morphine) per day. But blood tests show levels of 40 or so and toxic levels are >2000. In other words, Tim is only absorbing a small fraction of those 16 pills.

Seeking an easier solution to his chronic pain, I sent him to a Portland Pain Clinic, but the doctors had no procedures that would limit pain in all those skeletal locations.

For years, Tim received his medication without incident. However in the summer of 2023, things changed drastically. He was denied his monthly refill by first Walmart, then Rite Aid, then Walgreens, then Fred Meyer, then Safeway, then Furness, then Castle Rock. Then he tried Long Beach, Chehalis, and Centralia—all sympathetic, but none had 480 pills. Mail order firms Centerwell and Optum declined. After 12 denials, he considered buying fentanyl or taking his own life.

But then Bethany, our green-haired MA, was able to procure 10 day “bridge” prescriptions, one at a time, from Long Beach, Rosauers in Ridgefield, Costco Vancouver, and Costco Camas. Finally and fortunately, the pharmacist at Portland Costco was able to fill Tim's prescriptions.

Tim dreads phone calls, worrying that the caller might announce supply issues or corporate policies that wipe out his meds. And then what? Bed? Fentanyl? Cemetery? Tim is “giving back” by volunteering to provide transportation for some patients who can't get to Vancouver or Portland to pick up their pills.

WHY is this happening?

This situation is the unforeseen consequence of the *Opioid Overdose Death Settlements*. The goals were 1) stop prescription drugs from getting into the street market, and causing overdose deaths; and 2) provide billions of dollars for government programs to prevent overdoses. The \$55,000,000,000 has been allocated from pharmaceutical manufacturers, distributors, and retail pharmacy chains. **But only 4% of overdose deaths in Washington State involve prescriptions.** Nevertheless, Exhibit P forces independent pharmacies to block prescriptions from the “top 10 prescribers of opioids” in the area. Inasmuch as so few clinics will prescribe, the top 10 includes literally every prescriber. This ban, then, is forcing patients to obtain pain relief from street dealers, or to consider suicide.

It's time for Exhibit P to be deleted from those agreements.

Pass your story on to those who may be able to help eliminate Exhibit P. See contact information on the back of this page.

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