



**‘DAILY OKLAHOMAN’ POINT OF VIEW REGARDING NATIONAL
ALCOHOL AND DRUG ADDICTION RECOVERY MONTH:
RECOVERY IS REALITY IN OKLAHOMA**

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If a friend or loved one has cancer or heart disease, it would be unthinkable to allow them only one chance for treatment – only one operation or one chance to make major lifestyle changes to arrest their illness. Yet, when it comes to substance abuse treatment, people addicted to drugs or alcohol typically are considered incapable of help after failing an initial chance at recovery. Relapse, following treatment, too often is viewed as failure. People are shamed as lacking self-control or willpower, or otherwise dismissed as immoral, weak, or being non law-abiding citizens.

The truth is that substance abuse is as much a medical issue as heart disease, diabetes, cancer or other chronic ailments. And, like these illnesses, recovery is not only possible, it is a reality – a fact of which we all can be aware in September, the 15th Annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month.

For years, addiction has been recognized by professional medical organizations as a primary, chronic, progressive and sometimes fatal disease.

Much like other chronic illnesses, environmental and behavioral components such as diet, exercise, stress and lifestyle all contribute to both the onset and management of these diseases. Just as a person may be genetically predisposed to heart problems, so are people predisposed to addiction. In fact, a report in the September issue of *Human Molecular Genetics* quotes scientists as saying they have identified a specific gene that appears to be linked to both alcoholism and depression. The gene, tabbed the “CHRM2” gene, is involved in attention, learning, memory and cognition, and is strongly associated with both alcoholism and depression.

Bill Moyers, vice president of external affairs for the Hazelden Foundation, and a nationally recognized expert on substance abuse treatment processes, went through treatment three times before it finally “took.” Today, he pays taxes, votes, obeys the law and makes a positive contribution to society. His message is that “treatment does work and it can change lives.”

The argument that it costs too much to send people to substance abuse treatment doesn’t hold water when you compare how much *untreated* addiction costs our state – more than \$7 billion a year in both public and private funds. Nationally, the economic burden of addiction – including health care costs, lost worker productivity and crime – is estimated at greater than \$400 billion each year. The fact is that treatment is a sound fiscal policy in addition to being a vital step toward maintaining healthier communities and families.

Certainly, those in recovery from substance abuse must take responsibility for managing their disease and taking the necessary actions to avoid relapse.

The concept and practice of disease management are critical in allowing tens of thousands of Oklahomans, those with addiction, heart disease, cancer and diabetes, among others, to maintain productive and fulfilling lives. Please join me in recognizing and celebrating September as the 15th Annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month.

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