

*Bill Schaser*

No one can deny that this community, like so many others, has its share of people addicted to opioids and heroin. It seems to me that those addicted basically fall into 2 categories: On the one hand we have folks from stable families who were prescribed medication for pain relief, possibly due to work-related circumstances, and found themselves addicted. In medical jargon that's called iatrogenic – medically induced. On the other hand, we have unemployed, transient types who became addicted through recreational use or some other reason. I don't want to trivialize their plight, but I'll admit to being a bit less sympathetic to the latter.

As you may know, a methadone clinic called Aegis is planning to come to Eureka. Their web site claims they are the largest outpatient center in California for heroin and opioid addiction, with 32 clinics and growing. I'm not sure it's ever a good idea to introduce a for-profit-model into drug addiction treatment; there's just too much room for shenanigans - especially if the focus is on maintenance and profit. Getting off heroin and opioids is obviously positive, but is detox the primary goal of Aegis or do they lean towards maintenance, a great business model as it keeps people coming back for extended lengths of time?

What I find very interesting is that I don't see any Aegis clinics in the other counties of the North coast. Nothing in Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, Del Norte or Trinity. Would that make Humboldt County a hub, a regional supplier of methadone and, therefore, a destination point for yet more street addicts? Do we need more people sleeping in business doorways, on benches, or camping out in the woods near the proposed location?

I have many other issues with drug addiction, but my main concern now is that Aegis has committed to buy the vacant pediatrician's office at 2800 Harris. That would mean they would become a permanent fixture in that neighborhood. Is it appropriate to locate a methadone clinic in a predominately residential part of town – especially an out-of-the-area, for profit one? I think not. Look at some of the local businesses in town that have had to resort to chain-link fences and razor wire. Is this what that neighborhood can expect?

Does it make sense to locate a methadone clinic next door to a preschool and across the street from a pediatric dentist? Shouldn't the surrounding neighborhood have a say? The Harris Street Safeway, near the proposed location is no longer open 24/7. Is that because of problems with the transient population? Is it likely they would see even more problems?

I'm afraid I see this so-called solution to our addiction problem as just legalized drug pedaling with little benefit for our county. Let's reject the Band-Aid approach of substituting an illegal drug for a so-called legal one and start addressing the underlying causes of this chronic disease.