

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

'Toughing It Out' Doesn't Work for Severe Pain

We need access to the drugs that help

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Recently Attorney General Jeff Sessions gave Americans suffering severe pain some advice: "People need to take some aspirin sometimes and tough it out a little."



As someone who has suffered chronic pain for over 20 years, his remarks make me very angry.

Sessions was responding to the opioid epidemic. I agree that something must be done. I lost my brother to an opioid overdose nine years ago. I miss him every day.

But I also use prescription opioids responsibly myself, and I rely on them to help control my pain.

Imagine severe, throbbing head pain — combined with nausea, vomiting, and visual disturbances. Light and sound hurt your

head, so you are in a dark room. If you can fall asleep, great. Sleeping can make migraines go away sometimes.

But sometimes you aren't tired, or it hurts too much, and you just lay there hurting.

Now imagine doing this several times a week, every week, for over 20 years. That's my life.

"Tough it out" is what you do when the pain is temporary and when there's an end to it. It's what you do when the pain isn't too severe.

But what if the pain is severe, and nothing makes it better, and there is no end in sight? When it hurts that much, every single day, there's no more joy in life. There's only pain.

Fortunately, I've found two drugs that work. Just two: oxycodone and marijuana. And apparently Jeff Sessions thinks I shouldn't take either of them.

Medical marijuana is obviously the better of the two. It's less addictive and it won't kill you. Gaining access to legal medical marijuana has changed my life.

It's also helped me drastically cut down on opioid use.

I've taken Oxycodone regularly and responsibly for the last decade. I make sure to take it seldom enough that I don't develop a tolerance for it, and I never increase my dose. I try to take it once every two months, and I will not under any circumstances take it more than once a week.

I reserve Oxycodone for the most severe pain. It's such a relief to have an option that will treat my worst migraines. I "tough out" the less severe ones, including the one I have right now.

Why do I use these two controversial drugs instead of something else? Because literally nothing else works. I've tried about 20 different over the counter and prescription medications, herbs, meditation, acupuncture, and even Botox injections.

Nothing. Else. Works.

Not everyone can take opioids safely. My brother couldn't. He was my best friend and my only sibling. We need to do something about opioid addiction in this country.

More broadly, we desperately need universal health care — including mental health care.

In the end, it was mental health care that my brother and I both needed — him for his addiction, me for my migraines, and both of us for trauma and anxiety.

I've finally found a wonderful mental health therapist and I'm making progress in healing my trauma. My migraines seem slightly less severe. But the therapy costs thousands of dollars a year, and so many people don't have thousands of dollars a year. Especially people whose ability to work is limited by illness.

While we work toward a better mental health care system, those of us who suffer chronic pain need to be able to access the drugs that help us stop hurting. For those who can use them responsibly, opioids and medical marijuana are truly lifelines.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Re-circulating Your Dollars into the Black Community

Rewarding those who help and support us

BY PHILLIP JACKSON

Once and for all, let's get this straight. America has gotten out of the black people business! No help is coming from Washington, D.C.



No help is coming from state government. No significant help is coming from city and county municipal governments. No useful help is coming from foundations and corporations. We, black people, are on our own. And, really, for centuries, we were always on our own.

Most jobs that blacks once had in America are now done by computers, machines and robots. Many of the other jobs that we used to have are now taken by immi-

grants or have grown beyond our collective skillsets. Black leadership is still using protest tactics and methodologies from the 1950s to address 2018 economic problems. Those tactics won't work. There is no more cotton for black people to pick, and but our leadership teaches us to have a have a cotton picking and sharecropper mentality.

Even if black people continue acquiring wealth at our present rate and white people stop acquiring any additional wealth, it would take 228 years to close the racial wealth gap. As of 2013, white households had \$116,000 in median household net worth and black families had \$1,700 of median household net worth. Regardless, it is projected that by 2053 black median household net worth will be at zero dollars. Black people's net worth will be at the same level as when we came out of slavery in 1865.

The good news: Black people in America have a gross national income of about \$1.3 trillion. The bad news: Only 2 percent or about \$26 billion of those \$1.3 trillion

are re-circulated in the black community.

If black dollars were more re-circulated in black American communities, black dollars would produce black companies, help hire black employees, support black families and rebuild black communities. Instead, our \$1.3 trillion income makes other people rich including whites, Arabs, Koreans, Pakistanis, Indians, Latinos, Chinese, Polish, even blacks from the Caribbean and the continent of Africa.

Black people need a simple plan to alter our trajectory. Here's a plan: Join with The Black Star Project in the "Circulate Black Dollars in Black Communities" campaign and receive a "Black dollar stamp." You can stamp all of your paper money with this stamp (legal according to Title 18, Section 333 of United States Code and Title 18, Section 475 of United States Code) and make a conscious effort to spend your dollars with black people every time you use cash.

If 43 million black people consciously move their spending efforts from 2 percent with black people to 4 percent with black

people, \$26 billion more will be infused into the black economy. If black people can move their spending habits from 2 percent to 10 percent with black people, an additional \$104 billion will be generated. Theoretically, \$104 billion would produce between 400,000 and 750,000 new jobs and geometrically accelerate black financial and social well-being.

As black spending becomes more intentional, our social and economic issues will disappear. We won't have to wait for others to give us financial permission or support so that we might fix our own problems. We will declare a new freedom and help take control over the lives of everyone in our communities.

Your dollar is your most potent weapon in a capitalistic society. We must learn to use our dollars to reward those who help and support us, and to punish those who don't. Circulate black dollars in black communities!

Phillip Jackson is founder and chairman of the Black Star Project in Chicago.



Charles Washington

Born: 1951 - 2012

Former Publisher of the Portland Observer

In memory of an outstanding and dedicated member of Portland's Longest Standing Minority Publication.

The Portland Observer

