

EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Addiction the base for lots of tragedy

According to Dwight Holton, many modern tragedies begin with an addiction.

Crime, mental health breakdowns, even suicide and homicide can often be traced back to a pill or a poison — some brains are just wired to be susceptible to outside influence. And many of the systems of care and punishment our society has in place don't do much to get to the root of the problem, or save people who are in danger of hurting themselves or others.

Holton is a former federal prosecutor and Oregon's U.S. attorney. In that line of work, by the time he got involved it was too late. Someone had already been hurt, bad decisions had been made, lives had been impacted for the worse.

In 2014 he took over as director of Lines for Life, a Portland-based nonprofit that has twin goals of preventing substance abuse and suicide. He wanted to get involved early, to prevent the bad decisions in the first place. And while might seem at first glance that substance abuse and suicide are different threats, Holton said they are nearly always intertwined.

In the course of that work, he quickly realized that the major source of substance abuse problems in Oregon come from prescription pills. They kill more Oregonians than all illegal drugs — hundreds a year. Holton said a major factor may be that Oregonians think prescription pills are safer than they actually are. We think heck: these things are legal, they are given to me by my doctor and they make me feel better. What's the downside?

Addiction can cause people to do terrible things outside their

own nature. They lie and cheat and embezzle and burgle and assault and kill. They get stuck in a cycle of depression and broken relationships. There is literally nothing good that comes from it.

So how can the state reduce the number of people laid low by prescription pills? Holton's plan is to reduce the number of prescribed but unnecessary opioids. Currently, 100 million such pills are prescribed in Oregon each year. He also

wants more places where patients can dispose of unused medicines. In addition, Holton sees the benefit of better treatment and less-addictive versions of the medication.

There is lots to talk through and plenty to think about, which is why Holton is taking his crew on the road.

They met Friday in La Grande, the first discussion to kick off the first phase of identifying best practices across the state.

We realize it is a root issue that leads to all kinds of rotten social ills, and agree with Holton that time and money spent up front will save us even more down the road —

including a society with fewer broken lives and families.

There is no easy answer to the problem of prescriptions drugs. Science continues to learn more about addiction, and continues to

fine tune medicines that reduce the likelihood they will be misused.

One simple way to start is to realize how dangerous prescription opioids can be. Use them only when necessary, discard them when you're through, and if you think you have a problem get help immediately. Lines for Life (call the helpline at 1-800-923-4357) is a great place to start.

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Addiction can cause people to do terrible things outside their own nature.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Love and merit

There are two great defining features of child-rearing today. First, children are now praised to an unprecedented degree. As Dorothy Parker once joked, American children aren't raised; they are incited. They are given food, shelter and applause. That's a thousand times more true today. Children are incessantly told how special they are.

The second defining feature is that children are honed to an unprecedented degree. The meritocracy is more competitive than ever before. Parents are more anxious about their kids getting into good colleges and onto good career paths. Parents spend much more time than in past generations investing in their children's skills and résumés and driving them to practices and rehearsals.

These two great trends — greater praise and greater honing — combine in intense ways. Children are bathed in love, but it is often directional love. Parents shower their kids with affection, but it is meritocratic affection. It is intermingled with the desire to help their children achieve worldly success.

Very frequently it is manipulative. Parents unconsciously shape their smiles and frowns to steer their children toward behavior they think will lead to achievement. Parents glow with extra fervor when their child studies hard, practices hard, wins first place, gets into a prestigious college.

This sort of love is merit based. It is not simply: I love you. It is, I love you when you stay on my balance beam. I shower you with praise and care when you're on my beam.

The wolf of conditional love is lurking in these homes. The parents don't perceive this; they feel they love their children in all circumstances. But the children often perceive things differently.

Children in such families come to feel that childhood is a performance — on the athletic field, in school and beyond. They come to feel that love is not something that they deserve because of who they intrinsically are but is something they have to earn.

These children begin to assume that this merit-tangled love is the natural order of the universe. The tiny glances of approval and disapproval are built into the fabric of communication so deep that they flow under the level of awareness. But they generate enormous internal pressure, the assumption that it is necessary to behave in a certain way to be worthy of love — to be self-worthy.

The shadowy presence of conditional love produces a fear, the fear that there is no utterly safe love; there is no completely secure place where young people can be utterly honest and



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

themselves. On the one hand, many of the parents in these families are extremely close to their children. They communicate constantly. But the whole situation is fraught. These parents unconsciously regard their children as an arts project and insist their children go to colleges and have jobs that will give the parents status and pleasure — that will validate their effectiveness as dads and moms.

Meanwhile, children who are uncertain of their parents' love develop a voracious hunger for it. This conditional love is like an acid that dissolves children's internal criteria to make their own decisions about

their own colleges, majors and careers. At key decision-points, they unconsciously imagine how their parents will react. They guide their lives by these imagined reactions and respond with hair-trigger sensitivity to any possibility of coldness or distancing.

These children tell their parents those things that will elicit praise and hide the parts of their lives that won't. Studies by Avi Assor, Guy Roth and

Edward L. Deci suggest that children who receive conditional love often do better in the short run. They can be model students. But they suffer in the long run. They come to resent their parents. They are so influenced by fear that they become risk averse. They lose a sense of agency. They feel driven by internalized pressures more than by real freedom of choice. They feel less worthy as adults.

Parents two generations ago were much more likely to say that they expected their children to be more obedient than parents today. But this desire for obedience hasn't gone away; it's just gone underground. Parents are less likely to demand obedience with explicit rules and lectures. But they are more likely to use love as a tool to exercise control.

The culture of the meritocracy is incredibly powerful. Parents desperately want happiness for their children and naturally want to steer them toward success in every way they can. But the pressures of the meritocracy can sometimes put this love on a false basis.

The meritocracy is based on earned success. It is based on talent and achievement. But parental love is supposed to be oblivious to achievement. It's meant to be an unconditional support — a gift that cannot be bought and cannot be earned. It sits outside the logic of the meritocracy, the closest humans come to grace.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

Some children feel love is not something they deserve because of who they are, but is something they must earn.

YOUR VIEWS

Moore's story moved city manager

I read with interest the letter to the editor submitted by Mr. Cronin, "BMCC opens the doors to opportunities." I found it particularly interesting in the end when I discovered that he was writing about a girl's college basketball player that my wife and I have learned to enjoy watching. We were very pleased to learn some time ago she was offered the scholarship to the U of O. Now learning of her past struggles and overcoming obstacles we are even happier for the success she has achieved, supported by our local college.

I have told my younger children they will grow up to be Timberwolves. Selfishly, I hope they too will be playing basketball and/or baseball.

This is not a letter in support or against the bond measure. As a professional administrator for the city of Pendleton, I am required that I refrain from being publicly active in campaigns.

It is, however, an opportunity for me to say how I respect Mr. Cronin's ability to use the written

word to move people. Frankly, the letter you submitted was beautiful and I thank you for sharing it.

Robb Corbett
Pendleton

Bedford Bridge ban poorly thought out

Until recently, hardly anyone in Pendleton had heard of Bedford Bridge and even fewer knew it was a favorite hangout for congregations engaged in alleged wrongful behavior. I believe Chief Roberts has uttered unprovable statements.

When you have a small police force nestled in an area where there are more chickens and cows than people, there is not much to do beyond staying awake. You want to enhance your image as real crime fighters. There is a temptation to create crimes to bust.

Furthermore, the ordinance is poorly thought out and drafted. It does not limit the number of people who may gather together. It says they shall not do certain things. Consequently, 50 persons may huddle up if they don't alarm and annoy.

How about the Round-Up and

Pendleton's numerous parades? Are the cops prepared to arrest 10,000 people for jamming the sidewalks?

Let's forget that this proposal came up. Chief Roberts ought to petition the city council to prohibit UFOs from buzzing Pendleton airspace.

John Shippentower
Pendleton

Demonstrated need for Hermiston seniors

Three things are happening in the Hermiston area that are indicative of the need for a growing senior center in the very near and far future.

1. The "Silver Tsunami." Many of the baby boomers are still working and have yet to take advantage of senior services in the area. As they retire and start to collect their Social Security, they will look to the community for their special needs. Economists say that the baby boomers are moving

through the economy as if a boa constrictor swallowed an elephant. The "Silver Tsunami" is here and about to explode.

2. The growth forecasts for the immediate area are huge. Hermiston is one of the fastest growing areas in the state of Oregon, and has been for several years. Again, the aging population will draw heavily on senior service needs.

3. After the new center is built, the present agreement is that seniors are in complete control for the first five years. After that, the city will join in the management and the purposing of the center, which could include many activities for the greater population, such children's programs and other purposes. At the that time, the community will most certainly have the desire to expand the existing facilities.

The Hermiston Senior Center Board unanimously selected the site at Northeast Fourth and Aspen Drive to meet these goals. Our

seniors and community deserve a well planned center looking far into the future.

Irene Miller, chairman
Hermiston Senior Center

Vote Plass for BMCC board of education

I strongly support Susan Plass, an outstanding candidate for the Zone 7 position on the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education.

Retired from her accomplished career pursuing grant opportunities for BMCC, Susan understands the economic and social issues facing the board. Her stated goal is to work to promote student success, community engagement, and fiscal responsibility at BMCC. Susan is knowledgeable and experienced, and she would be an extremely effective member of the BMCC board.

Please vote for Susan Plass.
Susan Badger Doyle
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.