

Submission
No 12

INQUIRY INTO DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

My story to date.

I am a 41 year old male. I have been battling drug addiction since I was a teenager. I started dinking around 14 years, smoked some pot around the same time. When I was 17 I went to university in Brisbane where I started using what people called recreational drugs socially like ecstasy and LSD. Eventually I was introduced to amphetamines and soon after was injecting. By the time I had graduated from uni three years later I was 20 and had a heroin addiction before I really even understood what that was.

I went to work as a commercial cameraman for a production company straight out of Uni. I soon realized my heroin addiction was a real problem, so with the support of my family I started to seek a solution.

I could fill a book with the methods and madness I went through over the next years in an attempt to free myself of this addiction.

Here are the highlights...

The methadone program was very popular in QLD at the time, so it was logical that the first treatment I sought involved methadone and counselling. I had detoxed at HADS and other facilities but found myself using again shortly after being released each time. And there were many, many times.

Although the methadone program kept me mostly free from the withdrawal symptoms associated with my addiction, and allowed me to function, to some degree, in the workplace, it certainly did nothing to reduce my habit. The reality was all it did was increase my heroin habit over the years I was on the program. I still took heroin at every opportunity, usually daily, but now I was addicted to another drug as well. I was now in an even worse situation of having a sizable and growing heroin addiction as well as being chained to the methadone program and at the mercy of its system.

I eventually freed myself of Methadone simply by using more and more heroin. After years I was back where I had started but with a much larger habit.

I struggled on this way for many years through regular detoxes and failed rehabilitation facilities all over the country. I tried many and varied things from the exotic to the ridiculous. I was becoming more and more desperate.

It wasn't until I was introduced to a doctor in Queensland by the name of Stuart Reece, who was trialling an experimental treatment program involving Naltrexone, that I got my first real taste of sobriety, and managed to string together enough real drug free days to be proud of.

It took a couple of goes at the rapid detox program he offered at first, as I was taking Naltrexone orally after the detox sessions, and as is the nature of an addict, I eventually found ways to avoid taking it from time to time, and used.

Stuart could see by my persistence that I was determined to be clean but was struggling with the discipline of taking naltrexone orally. He offered me and I had, my first Naltrexone implant.

This decision changed my life.

I was in my late twenties. I was tired of the life that was facing me as an addict. I was suicidal. I needed to change my life or die.

As a natural skeptic I tested the implant in the first few weeks of having it. Once I knew I wasn't going to get any effect off heroin anyway I stopped trying. I was clean for 6 months.

Not only was I clean but I managed to pick up the pieces of my life and begin making amends very quickly. The naltrexone implant allowed me to get back to work and function normally and most importantly took away the obsession to use drugs every day. I never cease to amaze me how quickly my life can be turned around once the option of heroin is taken out of the equation, and this is exactly what a naltrexone implant does for me, instantly.

Combined with regular counselling, the naltrexone implant allowed me to start taking my life back.

It wouldn't be the last time I'd use heroin. The battle to stay clean continues today.

I have flown to Perth several times to have implants with DR George O'neil. Stuart Reece introduced me to George after his clinic in Queensland was shut down.

18 months is the longest period I have been completely clean with an implant.

Eventually, after the implants wear off I tend to find myself somewhere I don't really want to be, doing something I really don't want to do. And I hate that.

What's kept me alive through those busts, is the knowing through experience that I don't need to keep going down that path. Knowing there is a way of getting clean and staying clean. Certainly only one way I have found, and I have tried them all. I need to get some help to get clean and get another Implant.

What I am finding is that the drug free periods are getting longer and longer. More importantly the periods of drug using are fewer and less intense. Less destructive. I am able to get back on track a lot quicker before addiction takes over and completely ruins my life again. I am always constantly aware of how quickly my life can deteriorate once again.

I just turned 41. I have a family now. A wonderful supportive partner, a beautiful 18 month old baby girl, and another baby due in May.

I just returned to Sydney after working overseas for a year. I had my family with me and I was completely drug free the whole time I was away. It has been over a year since I had my last implant.

I know its not working any more because I have used heroin recently and I am very concerned about where that is heading. I am not using right now but I am fearful about how long that will last without some help. I have a lot to lose and now its not just my life but my families that hangs in the balance.

So I find myself at one of those points where I need to get myself some professional help, some counselling, get an implant, and get on with my life.

The first person I turned to after my recent relapse was Dr Ross Colqohoun.

When I called Ross he told me had had to shut down his clinic and unfortunately had been instructed that he couldn't practice his profession anymore. Not good news for me, and I'm sure there are a lot of others.

I met Ross when I moved to Sydney more that three or four years ago. I was directed to him through George O'neils clinic in Perth.

I was working full time in Sydney, so wasn't able to get away to Perth. I was very glad to find someone in Sydney, on this side of the world, that was able to understand my situation and was equipped to deal with it.

What struck me most of all about Ross in the first assessment interview I had at his clinic, was that he seemed genuinely interested in my situation and concerned about my well being. He was softly spoken, very knowledgeable on the subject of addiction, and most importantly ready to help me.

I had another assessment session where I was referred to a GP for physical tests including an ECG and blood scans. I had another counselling session with Ross after that where we agreed to have an implant as soon as possible. I hate to think what I would have done if Ross hadn't been there for me then.

I had the implant put in the following weekend with no incident, and was back at work the following Monday. I continued to see Ross regularly after that first implant. Though I'm not a great fan of Psychologists I do respect the place that therapy has in treating addiction. Its essential.

Over the next years I developed a good clinical relationship with Ross. I had several implants put in at Psych n Soul without any complication at all. More importantly I feel that Ross was always there for me as a counsellor and Psychologist. I had regular sessions with him for some time that eventually also involved my partner and mother of my children. I have never been able to find someone like Ross, in all my years of addiction and travel who has the right balance of knowledge of addiction and addictive behaviour, and psychology. His

methods are practical but gentle. He is understanding and has always had a genuine concern for my health, and that of my families.

I'm not sure where I'd be without Ross's help. I'm not sure whether I'd be alive. I know I would certainly have lost my family.

It really concerns me that because of Ross's situation, having to shut down the Psych n Soul clinic and not being able to practice, I have lost the most trusted therapist I ever had along with the most effective treatment option in one blow.

This comes at a time when I feel like I really need to do something now to keep my recovery on track. I feel like just as I was starting to get somewhere with this problem, I've had every tool and all the best support I have taken from me.

I don't understand.