

Memo: "Addiction is a disease of stigma. It is seen as a bad thing and that you are bad person if you have an addiction. We need to take the stigma out of this disease."  
Dr. Punyamurtula S. Kishore

**Local doctor: 'addicts are good people with a bad disease'**

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Life is on the upswing for Joanne, a recovering alcoholic and mother of a 21-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son since she had her last drink on April 30. "I'm an addict and an alcoholic," said Joanne whose last name is being withheld for privacy purposes because she is undergoing outpatient treatment for substance abuse at Weymouth Medical Practice on Broad Street. "I'm a mother and a wife. Life became unmanageable for me."

Weymouth Medical President Dr. Punyamurtula S. Kishore said many people like Joanne suffer from drug or alcohol addiction because of broken lives and his organization has a two-year treatment plan to help people break free of substance abuse. "Addiction is a disease of stigma," said Kishore, founder of National Library of Addictions, to a gathering at the Weymouth Elks. "It is seen as a bad thing and that you are bad person if you have an addiction. We need to take the stigma out of this disease." He said people addicted to drugs are good people who have a bad disease. "Nobody wants to be an addict," Kishore said. "At age 14, a kid can be taken to the hospital for appendicitis and given a shot of Demerol and get addicted. Why do five or six people out of 100 individuals that are given a Demerol shot get addicted? I don't know." He said Weymouth Medical helps a person break free from substance abuse through outpatient treatment, education, and Naltrexone, a drug that eases an individual's craving for alcohol, heroin and cocaine. "The first year of addiction recovery is exceedingly difficult," Kishore said. "During that first year, it is important to treat the whole person." Joanne, a college graduate, began her descent into drugs and alcohol abuse at age 13. "I had my first drink at age 13," she said during a "Night of Knowledge" forum held by Weymouth Medical to increase public awareness about substance abuse on Tuesday, Sept. 30. "I started taking cooking extract from my home economics class. I then started smoking pot and using cocaine." Joanne continued to abuse these drugs through her teens and into adulthood. "I've been married three times, but this time I got it right," she said. "I was in an abusive relationship with my ex-husband who I drank with. I lived in fear of my husband and made eight suicide attempts. I hated myself and everybody else. I did not know it, but I really wanted to die." Joanne eventually reached out to Weymouth Medical Practice, an outpatient care center for people struggling with substance abuse. "I had to surrender if I wanted to live and by the grace of God I did not die," Joanne said. "I thank God for Weymouth Medical and April 30 was the last time I had a drink and I have been sober since." Kishore said efforts to help a recovering addict deal with the complex biological and psychological factors that encourage drug addiction can be made after a person has gone through the ill-effects of withdrawing from addictive substances. "We work with the patient's family," Kishore said. "When there is lying and stealing that has gone on by an addict we help them to see that those are all symptoms of a disease and that there is no ill will intended by the patient. We work intensively with families during the first year of recovery." Scott, 28, said he had a normal childhood growing up but his lifestyle eventually included drugs while attending high school. "I started smoking pot in high school," he said. "I eventually began using LSD but somehow managed to keep a 3.9 grade average. I thought I'm not bad. I still get good grades in school." Scott maintained a normal looking façade despite his use of marijuana and LSD. "I played sports while in high school," he said. "But one day a friend brought over some Oxycodone." Oxycodone or Oxycontin, as it is often called, is a prescription drug often taken by cancer patients to ease the symptoms of chemotherapy treatments. Oxycontin can be taken by swallowing it, inhalation through the nose or by injecting the drug into a vein. "I started to use that on the weekend and eventually I started using it during the middle of the week," Scott said. The drug use did not cause Scott's grades to fall and he graduated from high school. "In my senior year I worked at a hotel," he said. "I figured I was somewhat responsible even though I used drugs because I worked." Scott eventually got a job in a Boston hotel several years later and he was eventually earning \$70,000 a year and using heroin. "The money only fueled my addiction and I lost the job," he said. Scott eventually realized he had a problem with drug addiction and sought help from Weymouth Medical. "I found out about Weymouth Medical, and I've been clean for 67 days," he said to the gathering who applauded him. "A person that is addicted needs to change their habits and their friends. Today, I don't feel worthless." Kishore said Weymouth Medical and the National Library of Addictions try to help people realize substance abuse is a disease and it is necessary to remove the social stigma associated with it to help addicts get free from dependency. "There is hope," he said. "The good thing about addiction is when people get well, they make changes in their character and morals. We can't flee from this disease. We need to make the community a better place to live in." Kishore said some of the world's most famous statesmen once struggled with substance abuse before having a profound impact on their generation. "Winston Churchill was an alcoholic, but he became one of the best British leaders of all time," he said. Joanne said a recovering addict needs the support of family and friends to break a dependency on alcohol or drugs. "I went to AA, (Alcoholics Anonymous) back in 1996-1997," she said. "I was coming up on a year of sobriety and supposed to get a medallion. On the night I got my medallion, I left the meeting and was out in the parking lot and wanting to celebrate. I was alone and had nobody to celebrate with. I then decided to celebrate by going to the 99 Restaurant and I ordered an Alabama Slammer." She said Weymouth Medical staff are helping her recover from drug abuse. "I'm no longer on medications," Joanne said. "I now go to the food pantry and give people in need food. I've helped get three of my best friends into rehabilitation." Weymouth Medical nurse practitioner Manu Ehakral said society needs to remove the stigma it attaches to substance abuse to help addicted people recover. "It needs to be brought out in the open so people can get treated," she said. The forum climaxed a month-long observance of public awareness about substance abuse by medical and counseling groups that help addicted people. "You are all champions for being here tonight," Kishore said to the gathering. Weymouth Medical has been helping addicted people recover from substance abuse for nearly a year at its headquarters on Broad Street. The counseling center is one of 12 facilities that offers outpatient treatment and assistance to recovering addicts. Additional information about Weymouth Medical is available at the organization's online website: [www.weymouthmedicalpractice.net](http://www.weymouthmedicalpractice.net).