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Addiction-fighting medication becomes more widely available through federal grant

Published: Wednesday, December 27th 2017, 6:10 pm CST
Updated: Thursday, December 28th 2017, 11:40 am CST

By Lydia Hu, Anchor/Reporter [CONNECT](#)

BIRMINGHAM, AL (WBRC) - A \$1.5 million federal grant makes addiction-fighting medication available to people addicted to drugs and lacking insurance.

"We are just so excited," said Chris Retan, the executive director of the Aletheia House, a community-based organization providing substance abuse treatment and prevention services to low-income communities.

"Up until 90 days ago, there was no publicly funded medicated treatment assistance available in Jefferson County," explained Retan. "Now with these resources, we and other providers are able to provide the care that we need that was not available 3 months ago."

Addiction-fighting medication helps quell symptoms of withdrawal, which Retan says can feel like the worst case of the flu.

"Now we can say, you don't have to take heroin, we have a medication that will relieve the sickness as well," said Retan.

The medication is a gamechanger for Joshua Henry, who says he's been using drugs since his early teens. Now in his mid-thirties, Henry is getting help from the Aletheia House for addiction to cocaine, heroin, and prescription pills.

"I didn't find any other joy in life. All the little things in life that should bring you joy, I just didn't see anymore. The only thing I needed was drugs," said Henry.

After starting treatment over the summer, Henry is six months sober and says a prescription for addiction-fighting medication helps.

"It curbs those cravings so where you don't feel like you need to get high. Even if you did, there's a blocker. You couldn't," explains Henry.

Henry says he doesn't have insurance and wouldn't be able to afford to fill a prescription costing between \$200 and \$300, sometimes more.

But, because of the federal dollars, Henry doesn't have to pay hundreds of dollars for the medication, which includes Suboxone. Instead, he pays only \$5-10.

"People who we've not been able to help, people who have tried to do it without medication, who would leave, they would leave treatment, they are now staying because they are getting their sickness taken care of. That allows them to participate in the counseling program," said Retan.

The grant, called the Medication Assist Treatment Prescription Drug and Opioid Addiction Grant, is administered through the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

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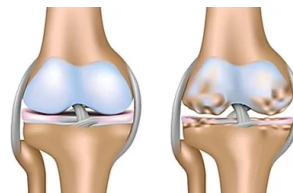
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