

## Supporting a Veteran through opioid addiction

**Cheryl:** I'm Cheryl and I am the, what I call life partner of Jerry, a Veteran. I met him in 1983, and his service was much before that.

When I met Jerry, he was getting divorced and we would drink socially. I saw his drinking as heavy social drinking and a problem because his personality would change dramatically when he was drinking. But I didn't really acknowledge it being a problem for a long period of years.

His health was deteriorating and I really didn't know what was wrong. So I finally said, "I'm going to the doctor with you." And Jerry had never shared with the doctor his symptoms that he was having until I got involved, and the doctor had him do some testing on his heart and his stamina, etc., and they found out that his, one of his arteries, his blood flow to his heart was significantly impaired.

And that led him to go into a surgeon and he needed open-heart surgery. He needed a valve replacement. It didn't really get seriously bad until after the surgery, and I attributed a lot of his symptoms to recovering from the surgery. So I gave him a lot of latitude for a while.

As much as I got involved in his medical care, I did not perceive that there was an issue with prescription medications. I regret it immensely now, but I didn't think of it, didn't check on his medications. I had no idea that that was exacerbating the alcoholism.

He did not come back and live with me. I told him he was not welcome to come back until he had completed a program, number one, and number two, lived on his own and was able to maintain, on his own, a healthy lifestyle. But I also told him that as long as he continued to try, I would support him, I would come and see him, and I did.

Until he finally did stay in a program, through the VA, called SART, which ultimately was the program that succeeded, and went off into an apartment on his own and has maintained sobriety, even though I still drink and we live together, he has, I am very proud of him. He does not behave like he used to under the influence. And he doesn't wander away like he used to.

My advice to somebody in a close relationship with a person that is not behaving in a healthy manner, who's not communicating, who's hiding what they're doing, that they may only be the tip of the iceberg. You do need to act. You do need to explore. You need to get involved as soon as you see signs that alarm you. The sooner the better.



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