

Robert G. Newman, M.D.
PRESIDENT

The following is a translation from the original German of a letter dated 16 April, 1988, written by Dorothea Klieber, Schwaben, West Germany. The letter is on letterhead of an Association called "Parental Help for Addicts." It appears to have been intended for distribution to physicians, although no specific addressee is shown. Appended to the 16 April, 1988 letter is a further document which is not dated and has no heading. This correspondence was sent to me in June, 1988, by Mrs. Klieber, who introduced herself to me following a conference at which I spoke in Frankfurt, Germany, in November, 1987.

To: Doctor

16. April 1988

Dear Dr. ,

On the way home following our detailed discussion various thoughts went through my head, but particularly something which I am sure would be of interest to you also:

At the panel discussion of the fifth methadone conference in the University of Frankfurt in November of last year (which included presentations by international addiction and methadone experts, which are currently being prepared for publication), several of the victims also spoke and had a major impact. For example, my son spoke about the many people who because of their addiction had to flee from the Federal Republic, where they are persecuted, to foreign countries where all too often they tragically succumb. (I would like to add that all of these people, as well as those who die as a result of suicide or side effects, never appear in

the official statistics of victims of drug abuse. They are victims of our drug politics). At any rate, my son asked if in this country one should (he quoted Professor Quensel) "Let the addicts continue to succumb in the gutters." At the end of the Conference he repeated the question he had previously raised, and challenged the international gathering of physicians to come up with an answer to the question : "Is it moral, is it ethical and is it consistent with the Hippocratic oath to let addicts die in the gutter with the slogan, accept my fine treatment or die?"

The answer to this question came from Professor Newman, President of Beth Israel Medical Center and Professor at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York: "Personally, I do not feel it is moral, ethical or consistent with the Hippocratic oath to reject people who desperately seek treatment, which we know through worldwide experience can be life-saving for many. It is

not moral

not ethical

not consistent with the Hippocratic oath!"

I asked myself if the German medical profession could be aware of the extraordinary intrusion in the therapeutic autonomy of licensed physicians through sanctions imposed by their professional organizations and bureaucrats. This could readily become a precedent. The very thought frightens me deeply, since I am

very conscious of my experience during the time of the Nazis. The lesson I learned from this period of my life: "Beware of the beginning!"

At any rate, the treatment of addiction is a problem which for the time being affects only a relatively small proportion of German physicians. Most of those who at some point have confronted this problem have managed in one way or another to stay away from this dangerous terrain. Under the conditions which exist here, this is understandable, and must be respected. But for the very responsible physician, who is guided by the drive to help people or at the very least to ease their suffering, limiting one's therapeutic capability in this way can hardly be a very satisfying solution.

Increasingly I have the impression that the political approaches to addiction in our country stem from a sense of helplessness with respect to the problem. The politics of addiction leads to a high price, which in the first instance is paid by addicts, often with their lives as in the case of my son. But this is a price which the heavily burdened families, partners, friends and not least of all our entire society share. It is futile to try to come to grips with the problem through ever more repressive measures. The experiences of the past decades have proven this. These efforts will never be effective, and the problems will only

become worse.

I give you these thoughts as a small epilogue to our discussion and send you best regards.

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Appended to the above letter is the following:

How much longer will we refuse humane help for addicts in our country?

First, I would like to introduce myself: I am the mother of a son who has been opiate dependent for more than 15 years. I shared and suffered with him all the stages of the disease which are inescapably associated with the life of an addict in the Federal Republic:

one and a half years in a juvenile detention center because of possession of a half-gram of heroin;

eleven long-term therapy experiences, two of which were continued until treatment was completed;

one episode of follow-up care;

sixteen hospitalizations in psychiatric institutions, many of which were for extended periods of time;

two episodes of guardianship;

about 30 cold turkey withdrawal episodes;

and again and again ambulatory treatment and counseling.

I don't know how my son was able to tolerate this, and I don't know how I was able to tolerate it. My husband died as a result of all this.

Apparently I too am guilty in the eyes of the law, since I supported my son by giving him money (something for which, on the other hand, the law gives me no alternative). I was consequently fined 1,500 Mark.

All of this, however, provides no more than a superficial view of the life of an addict who during his 30 years was forced to spend more than seven years locked up in institutions. From his earliest youth he was labeled as a criminal and psychiatrically disturbed, and thereby branded for his entire life. Daily I

experienced the psychic effects which resulted not from the use of opiates, but from this label and the punishment associated with addiction. And to all this must be added the devastating impact on social functioning: with such a biography, it is nearly impossible to find work or to achieve adequate vocational training.

But such a report will not surprise you, who for the most part are involved with drug addicts; it definitely is not a unique fate. What is special in all this is that my son, after fourteen years, finally obtained effective help: he was accepted into methadone treatment.

The amelioration was unimaginable. He was no longer faced with the threat of prosecution; his health improved amazingly; he once again had hope and plans; and he took his first steps toward making up for lost time with job training and with all that is associated with a normal life.

While he was in treatment I came to know a number of other patients and learned of their fates. Their results also were a source of amazement - even fascination. When we parents heard talk of zombies or words like that, we could only stare incomprehensibly. Because we knew that they couldn't possibly be referring to medically treated addicts. Similarly, nobody could

convince us of the alleged disadvantages, the negative side effects and the much more difficult withdrawal of substitution treatment. We simply knew better, because we saw the effects of medication-supported therapy on our own children.

In any event, we began to collect proof of employment in order to be able to demonstrate the effects of the treatment, and I founded "Parental Help for Addicts."

Then, after a very brief period of hope of a new beginning for my son and myself, a catastrophe hit: the physician was arrested, the practice was ended and roughly 100 patients were kicked back into misery, need and desperation. My son, no longer seeing any way out, tried to strangle himself. I found him, and was able to cut him down in time.

There followed more psychiatric admissions, and the threat of being locked up forever. He barely escaped this fate by professing a willingness to accept enrollment in another long-term therapy program.

But this, too, is not a unique case: one of my wards was a very talented 24 year old who with the help of methadone was able to continue his studies. After the enforced termination of treatment, on my advice, he entered a long-term therapy program.

After three weeks he broke it off, returned to Munich and jumped out of a fourth floor window onto the street. His last words: "I simply can't tolerate the therapy any more, and I do not want to become a criminal."

After the police forced the closing of the physician's practice, I was drawn even closer to the other parents. Others joined us and we tried to do everything in our power in order to help the unfortunates. In vain! The only effective help, medical treatment, was rendered impossible, even though the legal system permits it. Responsible physicians who were prepared to provide this treatment were warned through every possible pressure that they would share the same fate as the arrested physician.

And thus began for most of the patients the damnable downward spiral: illegal drugs, the needle with all of the health risks, prostitution, criminality, prison, illness, suicide, death.

In light of all this, in conclusion, I ACCUSE - in the name of the general society, because of the failure to prevent the impairment to health and the threat of suicide, and because of the failure to prevent criminal activities.

I ACCUSE, in the name of thousands of addicts and their relatives, because of bodily harm resulting from failure to

provide help and because of refusal to make treatment possible.

I ACCUSE because of the toleration and the causation of unspeakable misery and damage to the body and soul of thousands of addicts, their relatives and the physicians who responsibly followed them.

And I do not hesitate to term all of this INHUMANE.

This "report of a mother" was presented on the 30th of November, 1987, at the Conference of Experts of the German AIDS-Assistance Committee, dealing with "Opportunities and risks of preventive approaches to AIDS among drug addicts and drug dependence."

Today, on the 2nd of June, 1988, I want to bring to a final conclusion my "report of a mother." My son, for 15 years persecuted and hunted, no longer saw any way out, and put an end to his desperate life. Methadone could have been his saviour.

I ACCUSE!

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