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It Can Happen in Lamorinda

By Nick Marnell



D'Anne Burwell

D'Anne Burwell noticed her son's slipping grades, his weight loss. But when his best friend told her that her son had a problem, the news shattered the dream life Burwell had imagined for her family. She finally confronted her 19-year-old over his OxyContin addiction.

"I paid for rehab," said Burwell. "But paying for rehab was enabling him. I told him that he needed to find recovery on his own." You cannot hurry a person who is in denial, she said, and after a year of failed rehab attempts, her son called home from Colorado and agreed to enter a detox facility.

"Part of my recovery is breaking my silence," said Burwell, an educator, who wrote the book "Saving Jake: When Addiction Hits Home" to raise awareness of the prescription drug abuse epidemic. She and fellow Bay Area author Erin Marie Daly, who wrote "Generation Rx: A Story of Dope, Death, and America's Opiate Crisis," will share their stories of pain and recovery from the scourge of

prescription drug abuse March 12 at a free conference in Lafayette.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 44 people die every day from an overdose of prescription painkillers, and many more become addicted.

Burwell said that her son, nearly four years clean and sober and close to finishing his college degree, was proud of the book and of his mother's decision to speak out.

Though the Burwell family story is on course for a happy ending, such was not the case for the Daly family.

Daly's brother took prescription painkillers in high school, and she said the one that stuck was OxyContin. From that drug, her brother progressed to heroin and he passed away from an overdose while away at college in San Diego in 2009. Daly, a freelance journalist, said she pieced the story together after her brother's death. "My brother was a very private person," she said. "Some have a predilection to addiction. But environmental factors contribute as well. Prescription painkillers are so readily available that anybody can become addicted. This could happen to my daughter one day."

Daly said that her goal is not only to educate people on the risks of prescription drugs, which she does through her blog Oxy Watchdog, but also to stress that compassion is essential for those who are addicted. "Nobody wants to hear this message," she said. "It's our dirty little secret."

In addition to Daly and Burwell, Jaime Rich, coordinator of the Lamorinda Alcohol Policy Coalition, will appear at the Lafayette conference. "Don't think that prescription drug abuse can't touch you, that this is not a problem in your community," said Rich. "It can happen in Lamorinda."

"An Afternoon with Authors: Prescription Drug Abuse Awareness" is scheduled from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 12 at the Lafayette Library Learning Center. For information, call (925) 385-2280.



Erin Marie Daly Photos provided

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