A Gay Meth Addict and a Clinician Explain Addiction and HIV

January 30, 2019 By Mark S. King

Dr. David Fawcett and I have an oddly symbiotic relationship. David has specialized in drug and sex addiction for many years, and I was a drug addict for many years. We've become close friends and have managed to use both of our experiences to speak out on the attraction of crystal meth for gay men and the addiction and recovery process from the drug.

David literally wrote the book on crystal meth and gay men (Lust, Men, and Meth: A Gay Man's Guide to Sex and Recovery) and invited me to contribute the foreward. That led to an idea we had to design a presentation that would weave my personal history with meth into his clinical explanations of how the drug affects the brain, how addiction takes hold, and how healing and recovery are possible.

Granted, David is providing the beef in our talk while I provide color commentary about the destruction resulting from years of abuse. But I do believe my entitlement, confusion, shame, and hopefulness are important to convey. The humanity of people struggling with drug use/abuse can be easily lost in the science of it all.

(If you have playback issues above, the video can be viewed on Youtube here.)

After giving the presentation at a few events, David and I were invited to present at HIV Endgame, a conference in Toronto sponsored by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network. Their conference was first-rate, and they were good enough to provide video packages of each of the plenary speakers. The connection is clear: meth use is a leading factor in new HIV infections.

My point of view is by no means universal. David and I are both white gay cisgender men, and thankfully, much work and community organizing is being done right now to address meth use in other communities. A recent forum in New York City organized by ACT UP NYC spotlighted meth use among gay and trans women of color. Adult film star Jacen Zhu became so concerned about meth among queer people of color that he started the hashtag #TakeDownTina.

And, where once there were documentaries on meth and gay men that featured only white men (such as Meth, the 2008 documentary in which I appeared), there is now a new film, Party Boi, about drug use among LGBTQ people of color. (Trigger warning: both these documentaries include graphic depictions of meth use.)

Still, the science of meth use and how the brain is transformed – and healed – is constant for us all, and David's non-judgmental, practical talk is something I found very comforting in my early recovery. It taught me that I wasn't unique, that my out-of-control meth use was part of a common trajectory among addicts and, most of all, that my struggle with recovery, including cravings and triggers, was rooted in biology – and could be overcome.

The presentation above is highly recommended for front-line workers in the field, or for anyone recovering from meth or wondering if they might have a problem.

Help is available. Recovery is possible.

Mark

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