



The War on Addiction

Inadequate Regulation, Standards and Oversight Allow Untrained, Unskilled and Unethical Counselors To Jeopardize Lives, Health and Recovery

While political leaders waged war on drugs, California's substance abuse treatment professionals have quietly waged their own battle against addiction, an insidious enemy that preys on people, fills our prisons and brings crime into our communities.

One out of every nine Californians suffers from drug or alcohol addiction, and eight out of every 10 felons sent to state prisons are substance abusers, according to California's Little Hoover Commission. In 2003, it found addiction costs California's economy \$32.7 billion annually and takes an incalculable toll on society.

The good news is treatment can work. For every \$1 spent on treatment, the commission found \$7 is saved.

The bad news is some of our front-line troops do not have the education, experience or expertise to effectively battle addiction, and the system has done little to remedy the shortcomings.

California has some of the lowest standards in the nation for substance abuse treatment professionals and little focus on improving the quality of rehabilitation services for the more than 200,000 Californians who seek help every year with their drug and alcohol addictions.

The Justin Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting individuals and families affected by drug abuse, reviewed public records to document the problems in California's residential treatment facilities and found untrained, unskilled and unethical treatment staff:

- Contributed to clients' deaths
- Risked clients' health
- Violated clients' rights
- Endangered the public
- Jeopardized the recovery of the very people they were supposed to help.

The Justin Foundation reviewed hundreds of pages of investigations conducted by the state agency that oversees drug treatment facilities – the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs – and from other state agencies. We have included some of the highlights here. More can be found in the attached document.

- A man undergoing withdrawal from drugs died after the staff admitted him to the detoxification unit without the medications he needed for several serious medical conditions, including heart disease and emphysema.
- One woman died after two staff members refused to provide cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) because, one of them said, she was too "freaked out."
- Three teens were stabbed and a fourth injured in a fight with four inmates who slipped out the window of a Northern California recovery center while their counselor was at a neighboring facility.
- A 3-year-old boy died of methadone poisoning after drinking his aunt's take-home medication from a treatment facility. The staff allowed the aunt to take the medication with her, even though they knew her roommate was abusing drugs and she was caring for a 3 year old.
- A mentally challenged man – with no substance abuse problem – was so seriously injured he was "choking on his own blood" after drug treatment center staff tried to "restrain" him.