

Addiction: It's a Disease, Not a Moral Failure



Last month, our nation's drug czar emphasized the importance of removing the stigma placed on drug abusers.

Addiction is a disease, not a moral failure, said Gil Kerlikowske, director of Office of National Drug Control Policy while making a significant policy announcement at the Betty Ford Center in Palm Springs, Calif.

He said: "this country hasn't looked at recovery in a way that makes sense," and that he intended to "use the bully pulpit of the White House in a way that brings it out into the open," according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Director Kerlikowske also pledged adding drug recovery as a major foundation to national drug policies, the newspaper reported. Until now, those policies have focused only on criminalization, prevention, and treatment.

His agency is proposing to expand access to rehabilitation. The new plan includes a voucher system to not only allow those recovering to pay for treatment, but also to pay for costs such as transitional housing, child care, and work-appropriate clothing.

These ideas are very encouraging. I applaud Director Kerlikowske for trying to help as he said the roughly 21 million people who need assistance but are unable to receive it under current policies.

He has been a great friend and supporter of NOPE Task Force over the past several years. He has spoken at our annual national vigil in



West Palm Beach, Fla. and has recorded video messages when he couldn't attend the vigil. I had the pleasure of accompanying him in Washington, D.C. at the unveiling of a national plan to fight prescription drug abuse.

Director Kerlikowske offered another powerful idea in the same speech: he encouraged people recovering from drugs to speak publicly about their successes, and failures, as a way to raise awareness about their struggles. "The best way to understand a person is to hear their story; I'm asking the recovery community to continue to tell the stories," he said, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

That's exactly what we do at NOPE Task Force. We bring out personal stories of what drugs do to individuals and their families, and we use them to educate young people so they don't make the same mistakes.

And most of all, we stress what Director Kerlikowske said so poignantly: addiction is a disease, not a moral failure.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.