**Pathways to Recovery: Addressing Opioid Addiction through Rehabilitation**

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The opioid crisis in the United States is one of the most devastating public health issues of our time. The book Dopesick by Beth Macy takes us through personal stories of people and communities who have opioid addiction, showing the deep struggles they face in trying to get sober. Characters like Betsy and Peter help us understand how complicated the road to recovery can be and how many treatment options do not provide the long-term support needed for lasting sobriety. Looking at the experiences shared in the book, it becomes clear that while there are many ways to approach rehabilitation, most of them fall short of truly helping people rebuild their lives after addiction. This paper will explore the different rehabilitation models in the book and consider how the system can be improved to better support people in their recovery journey.

In Dopesick, the rehabilitation process is messy, complicated, and filled with many setbacks. No single method stands out as the perfect solution, which is one of the book’s main points. One of the main issues is the lack of access to comprehensive, long-term rehabilitation programs. Characters like Peter and Betsy often enter treatment centers that focus primarily on detoxification, the first step in a much longer and more complex recovery process. While detox is crucial, it is not enough on its own. Take Betsy, for example. She goes through detox multiple times, but without ongoing support, she relapses again and again, proving how detox alone cannot address the root causes of addiction.

What seems to provide better results are programs that combine detox with therapy and mental health support. Peter’s story is one example; when he starts a program that includes cognitive-behavioral therapy and group counseling, he starts to see progress. These treatments target the psychological aspects of addiction, like trauma, depression, and anxiety, which are often underlying triggers for drug use. This kind of integrated care, where medical detox is paired with psychological support, seems to offer a stronger foundation for recovery compared to programs that only address the physical aspects of addiction.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) stress that treating opioid addiction requires a comprehensive approach that includes not just detoxification but also therapy, mental health care, and long-term support. They make it clear that addiction treatment is not something that can be solved with a quick fix. It is an ongoing process. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also emphasizes the importance of integrating behavioral health services with addiction treatment, as this combination can lead to better outcomes for people facing opioid use disorder (CDC, 2024).

Even though some rehabilitation strategies are effective, Dopesick highlights the major gaps in the system that prevent people from getting the help they need. One of the most significant issues is the lack of affordable, long-term treatment options. Many addiction treatment centers are underfunded, overcrowded, or only focus on a short-term detox, which leaves patients without the ongoing care that they need to maintain their recovery. This problem is often made worse by the stigma associated with addiction, which discourages people from seeking help or causes them to drop out of treatment early.

To make a real difference, the healthcare system should be restructured so that addiction treatment is integrated with general healthcare. Healthcare providers, like nurses or even nurse practitioners, are often the first to see people struggling with addiction, and they are in a prime position for early intervention. By making addiction screening a routine part of healthcare visits, providers can recognize at-risk individuals sooner and get them the proper treatment needed for recovery. Training healthcare workers in addiction management, pain management alternatives, and trauma-informed care would also go a long way in improving outcomes.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) recommend a multi-pronged approach to the opioid epidemic that includes better prevention strategies, more education for healthcare providers, and increased access to evidence-based treatments like medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and behavioral therapy. This approach would ensure that people have the care they need at every stage of recovery, from detox to long-term support. Expanding access to MAT, which uses FDA-approved medications like methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone to manage withdrawal symptoms and reduce cravings, has been proven effective in treating opioid addiction and preventing relapse (CDC, 2024).

Another crucial step is tackling the stigma around addiction. Many people struggling with opioid use disorder are reluctant to seek help because they fear being judged or discriminated against. This stigma can keep people from getting the treatment they need, completing rehab programs, or reintegrating into society. Dopesick paints a vivid picture of how stigmas can affect people in recovery, often treating them like second-class citizens. Reducing stigma through education campaigns and shifting cultural attitudes toward addiction to viewing it as a disease and not a moral failing is vital for improving access to care and recovery outcomes.

Addressing the social factors that contribute to addiction such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of housing, is also important. Many people struggling with addiction face challenges in their everyday lives that make it harder to stay sober, including unstable housing, lack of social support, and financial insecurity. I believe that rehab programs that address these social issues, in addition to addiction treatment, are more likely to succeed. Dopesick highlights the importance of stable housing and financial security in recovery, showing that without these basics, it is difficult for individuals to maintain sobriety.

Dopesick offers an insightful look at the opioid epidemic, showing us the real-life struggles of people trying to overcome addiction. One of the book's key takeaways is that effective rehabilitation goes beyond just detox. It must include therapy, medication-assisted treatment, and long-term social support. To better address the opioid crisis, we need a healthcare system that makes addiction treatment more accessible, integrates it with general healthcare, and provides long-term support. Reducing stigma, expanding access to treatments, and addressing social factors like housing and poverty will help create a system that offers people the best chance at long-term recovery.

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