

Case Study: Opioid Addiction

Craig is a married, 45-year-old who owns and manages a successful family construction company. He works long hours, employs a staff of 20, and has grown the business into a well-respected local company. While on the job, a piece of heavy equipment falls on Craig's back and causes multiple breaks in his lumbar vertebrae. As a consequence, Craig requires a back brace and 2-3 months of physical rehabilitation.

The injury caused Craig a great deal of pain (9/10), and his physician started him on a short trial of oral oxycodone 10 mg every 12 hours. Craig experienced immediate results (2/10), and in addition, noted a mild feeling of euphoria when taking the medication. Although the trial of oxycodone was supposed to be limited to one month, Craig requested additional medication at a higher dose from his physician. His dose was increased to 20 mg orally, twice per day. While this was initially helpful in keeping his pain at 2/10, Craig found himself taking more than his prescribed dose of medication. Ultimately, he sought care from multiple practitioners, each of whom would write him a prescription for oxycodone.

At a follow-up appointment, Craig's primary physician has discovered the extent of his use of oxycodone and the multiple prescriptions Craig has obtained from different physicians. Given this, he now obtains a more detailed substance use history. Within the past 3 months Craig has been taking between 120 mg to 200 mg of oxycodone per day. He has either been absent from work, or when there, not focused, spending most of his time recovering from the sedating effects of the medication, or planning for his next dose.

Further history taking reveals that while normally an outgoing individual, Craig has become isolated from his family, and his wife has been contemplating leaving him, having told him she "didn't know the person she was married to anymore." Craig has used high doses of oxycodone while driving and been involved in two minor traffic accidents. When not taking oxycodone, Craig will drink 2-4 beers a day to "take the edge off."

Craig has not used any other illicit drugs, but realizes he now has an addiction, but has been too ashamed and embarrassed to tell anyone. He is very worried that his providers will stop prescribing him narcotics, and recently contemplated buying heroin from a drug dealer. "I guess I want help, but I don't know where to get started; my life is mess." Craig then puts his hands over his face and weeps very loudly.