



Healing Addictions... Transforming Lives

Part I



When you mention drug abuse the image conjured up is one of addicts snorting, smoking or injecting illegal substances, which they have purchased on the black market, however there is a far more respectable facet of drug abuse, which statistics suggest is equally common and just as dangerous. It is prescription drugs, which, in the US, have actually outstripped illegal drugs

as a cause of death. An analysis of 168,900 autopsies conducted in Florida in 2007 found that three times as many people were killed by legal drugs such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, Valium and Xanax than by cocaine, heroin and all methamphetamines put together. While no one sets out to become an addict the drug in its street form is used for purely recreational purposes and anyone who tries heroin for the

first time will be well aware of what they are potentially getting themselves into. People are normally exposed to prescription drugs for legitimate medical reasons and can drift into a dependency without making the same sort of conscious lifestyle decision which users of illegal drugs inevitably make. Understandably few people in the UAE are willing to come out and discuss their problems as no



one wants to be saddled with the stigma attached to being an addict, even if their drug of choice comes over the counter.

It is testament to the extent of the problem that a drug treatment centre as far away as Thailand is inundated with requests from people in the UAE who have a problem with prescription drugs, Alastair Mordey is the program director and head counsellor at The Cabin in Chiang Mai. He is a certified and accredited addiction Counsellor with over 10 years experience working in treatment services. Mordey believes that prescription drug abuse in the UAE is probably more prevalent than people realise, "We receive phone calls from people in the UAE every week. Typical problems include addiction to anti depressants, anti anxiety drugs and painkillers, in particular Xanax, Valium and Tramadol. The trouble is that the body becomes resistant to these drugs very quickly which forces people to take much higher dosages, which can result in unpleasant side effects. People assume that because they have been prescribed these drugs by a doctor they must be harmless but that's not necessarily the case," he explains.

The Cabin Chiang Mai. Just an hours flight North of Bangkok, is considered to be one of Asia's most respected drug and alcohol recovery centres but to simply call The Cabin a rehab centre really doesn't do it justice. Hidden



amongst the lush greenery of Chiang Mai, so well in fact that even most locals in Chiang Mai have no idea where The Cabin is situated, allows for the centre to be very discreet and private (no signs, no indication of what lies within the walls). Away from prying eyes and the sites and sounds of the city, The Cabin, boasts picturesque views of Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai's mountain backdrop as well as the Ping River, which places The Cabin in a very special place mentally and physically to recover.

The Cabin presents like a 5-star luxury Lanna-style tropical resort, nestled on the Ping River. It's the stuff that Thailand coffee-table photo books are full of ... antique teak wood furniture and fittings, four-poster king size bed, swing seats on your veranda, a wooden deck overlooking the river and gardens to sit and enjoy a game of cards with your friends. Plus creature comforts such as air conditioning, large flat screen TV and DVD (with DVD library), hi-speed WIFI, and large bathtub

(and a fresco shower) in every cabin.

As well as the amazing scenery and surroundings that is The Cabin, an array of different type of excursions and activities are put forth as a challenge for everyone who stays at the centre on a weekly basis. This is part of The Cabin's motto for it's patients to challenge themselves, try new things. Develop new skills, achieve and accomplish while having good clean fun, which all becomes a part of the new person they will become.

Here are a list of the activities:

- Elephant Trekking
- Hill Tribe Trekking
- Nighttime Safari
- Canoeing
- National Park Tour
- White Water Rafting
- Thai Cooking Classes
- Jungle Zip Line Tour
- Waterfalls & Hot Springs
- Monkey & Tiger Sanctuaries
- Buddhist Temples
- Horse Riding
- Fishing



- Thai Jewelry Making
- ATV Jungle Tour
- Elephant Parks
- Chiang Mai Zoo
- Chiang Rai Tour

Success Story

One of the many successful patients to seek help at The Cabin was Steve (not his real name). "My driver was parked at a traffic light when someone drove his vehicle straight into the back of my car where I sustained serious neck injuries. I work for an oil company and they were very understanding about me taking time off in the immediate aftermath of the accident but I was keen to get back to work so the doctor prescribed me Tramadol for pain relief and it really helped and allowed me to return to work within a couple of weeks," he describes slipping into the cycle of addiction. As Steve soon discovered the long-term issues, which are associated with an opiate like Tramadol can often outweigh the short-term benefits.

"Initially I only planned to use it for a couple of weeks, thinking that once the pain in my neck subsided I would be able to stop. I decided to do it over the weekend because I had been warned that withdrawal might be difficult but I found I was simply unable to do anything. I spent Friday and Saturday in bed, my family thought I had the flu, but I felt like there was no way I could go to work on Monday unless I started taking the Tramadol again," he said. This would be the first of several unsuccessful attempts by Steve to stop or reduce his Tramadol usage, "I found the pills started to have less effect which meant I had to take more and more of them. I told myself that I had a well paid job with a lot of responsibility and this was a small price to pay for being able to operate effectively. I knew in the back of the mind that it was a problem though and eventually I booked a week off work so that I would have time to get used to life without Tramadol."



Ending a dependency to prescription drugs is rarely a straightforward process and, although he didn't realise it at the time, Steve found himself going through a process, which heroin addicts often refer to as 'cold turkey', "The flu like symptoms returned with a vengeance. My wife was aware of the cause but I didn't want my children to find out. It seemed selfish for me to allow my family to see me in that state when I knew all I had to do was take another pill and I would feel fine again, it was just a question of practicality really." After six months of daily Tramadol use Steve realised that it was starting to have an adverse effect on both his family life and his work life. Even though the original accident had occurred during working hours he felt his career would be irreparably damaged if he admitted his addiction to his boss. It was at this point that, while doing some online research, he came across an advert for The Cabin. "It appealed to me because it was not in the UAE and they seemed to specialise in my sort of addiction. At the time I felt that I was nothing like a cocaine addict or an alcoholic and didn't want to be thrown in with this group of people, although the truth is that





addiction doesn't discriminate. The Cabin helped me to detox, which I had never been able to do by myself, and helped me to return to the life which I had before the accident. That was 11 months ago and being addicted to Tramadol just seems like a bad dream now, no more than a distant memory."

If you wish to go 'all the way' and check into a rehabilitation / de addiction centre, following the guidelines below can make your treatment easier, and more successful

Specialization:

Narrow your choices to those programs that will be most helpful for your particular addiction, then find one that fits you. Some centres even specialize in those with multiple challenges, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, eating disorders, depression and mood disorders

Location:

Sometimes it is necessary to get away from all of the influences that may support or exacerbate your addiction, especially during the most intensive part of treatment. That is one reason why many treatment centres are located in rural settings. On the other hand, it may be important for you to be close to family and friends who can offer support. Discuss your concerns with a counsellor and figure out what will work best for your needs.



Staffing:

Make sure the programs you look at have degree holding medical professionals who specialise in drug addiction treatment. It may also be helpful if the treatment centre staff includes people who have battled addiction themselves and can offer their success stories as motivation.

Long term support:

Ongoing treatment and support can make the difference between long-term success and failure. Almost any program can keep

someone drug-free for a short period of time – the measure of success is in maintaining your recovery for the long-term. Look for a treatment centre that offers ongoing support services that will work with your lifestyle.

For more information about The Cabin visit:

www.thecabinchiangmai.com

or

telephone: +66 (0) 80446 8850

Wait for our next issue for an in depth look at drug abuse.