



PROBUS Club of Central Edmonton Newsletter

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Jan 16 - Dr. Niel Parker

Dr. Niel Parker is an addictions psychiatrist who 'labours' in the AHS Edmonton 106th Street Addictions Clinic. He spoke about the addiction crisis in Edmonton and Alberta. He provided a great deal of information on addiction and its treatment. I have captured only some of the points in this article.

In addition to Dr. Parker providing services at 106 St. clinic, he also provides services on the Military base. The talk he gave focused on a medical perspective.

The presentation started with some headlines from 2017 and Alberta declaring the opioid crisis. He noted that this past July was the worst month for deaths. There are 2 factions for treating opioid addiction on being harm reduction the other being recovery model.

One key event in the growth of addiction was the introduction of oxycontin and its marketing. It was sold as a safe opioid for chronic pain. "Nobody was going to get addicted to it". At this time, rules started to change around prescriptions. Product changes occurred which reduced its usability. Gains were offset by the introduction of black market fentanyl. Fentanyl is very addictive and requires frequent use. It is shipped in small packages and thus hard for law enforcement to catch. In 2011 there were 11 deaths per month from fentanyl use. It increased in subsequent years. By 2021 it is about 1600 a month.

Who are dying? There tend to be many more men than women dying. It is not limited to the inner City there are many deaths in other areas. The normal age of people who die is from 25 to the early 40's. So, we see working class men in the prime of their lives dying.

There are three main branches for treatment, these are:

1. Opioid Agonist therapy, Opioid agonist therapy (OAT) involves taking medications to treat opioid use disorder.
2. Addiction treatment, this is counselling, individually or in group to assist people in getting free of their addiction.
3. Harm reduction.

Dr. Parker works in the OAT area. Opioids are very addictive and very hard to stop using because withdrawal symptoms are horrendous. Replacement therapy OAT is designed to help. A drug, such as naloxone, which satisfies the craving without the effects of the fentanyl is prescribed. It is all that is needed by some patients. It is particularly effective when the patient has strong supports include a good job, place in the community, family, etc.

They have a number of drug options that they can prescribe, these are methadone, suboxone (combination of buprenorphine and naloxone), naloxone, and a long-lasting naloxone. The latter one need only to be injected once a month. He explained the advantages of naloxone and the challenges with methadone. Patients are on a drug like suboxone for 6 to 12 months may become addiction free after treatment period.

With respect to counselling services, the province has a robust service environment, some are public services and others are private. Public services are generally free, while private services may cost a

great deal. Counselling includes a range of services from group sessions to individual counselling and residential care (where the individual will check into a facility for a period.)

Harm reduction includes controlled drug use in supervised injection sites. At these sites drugs are guaranteed safe, clean needles are provided, access to other services is provided, and Naloxone kits are available.

In addition to the other harm reduction programs, there is safe supply. Safer supply refers to providing prescribed medications to people who are at high risk of overdose as a safer alternative to toxic illegal drugs. Safe supply services can help prevent overdoses, save lives, and connect people who use drugs to other health and social services.

Another treatment is narcotic transition services (NTS). NTS involve the use of high-potency opioid narcotics to help people with severe opioid addiction who have not been able to initiate or stabilize on conventional treatment medications. Services focus on stabilizing, tapering and transitioning patients under expert medical supervision to evidence-based opioid agonist treatment (OAT) medications. High-potency opioid narcotics include hydromorphone, diacetylmorphine, and fentanyl. They do not include buprenorphine, methadone or slow-release oral morphine. As high-potency opioid narcotics carry significant health and safety risks, standards are required to protect Albertans with opioid addiction receiving these highly specialized services and support evidence-based, recovery-oriented care. (Aberta gov't Website)

As a final comment, I wrote this on January 30. Coincidentally, I noted that a headline in the Jan 30 Journal stated that opioid deaths in 2023 could pass the record number in 2021. So, despite all the good work that Dr. Parker and others are doing (they are to be admired for it) the crisis seems to be getting worse.

Dr. Parker's presentation was quite "sobering" and thought provoking. We do thank him for the his visit and information shared.

Jan 23 - Muttart Conservatory



We benefited from a guided Tour of the Muttart Conservatory. The Conservatory consists of three city-operated greenhouses, public gardens, as well as four feature pyramids for display of plant species found across three biomes, with the fourth pyramid hosting a seasonal display. A fifth minor skylight pyramid lights up the central foyer. We toured the pyramids. (Picture taken from Muttart Website.)

To start I will point out that we saw a great many plants and heard a great deal about many of them. I have selected few to give the reader a flavour of the Muttart. I encourage anyone who is interested in seeing and learning more visit the facility.

We started in the arid zone. Here one will find cacti and other plants that live in extremely dry areas of the world. While the climate is dry it is not necessarily hot, so some plants have adapted to cooler nights by having fuzzy coverings to hold in heat. The first picture includes a number of plants the



second shows an example of a fuzzy cactus. Our guide pointed out the benefits of spines, apart from protection from predators, they catch dew and redirect wind both assist the plant in survival.



These pictures illustrate two examples of how plants adapt to low water conditions. On the left we see a cactus with accordion folds on it. This adaptation allows it to expand and contract as they take on more water and use it. Next is a Jade plant in full bloom. Its leaves are waxy this reduces water loss. Also, we learned that plants in dry climate take a long time to bloom, perhaps years. This is to preserve energy.



She pointed out a carab plant. It is distinguished by its seed which was used to weigh diamonds, since all seeds are of a uniform weight (it is the source of the word carat). Also, the seed are ground to produce carab powder which is a replacement for cocoa powder. It also has many other uses.



Next, we visited the tropical pyramid. These plants experience

1.5 to 5 meters of precipitation. One significant adaptation is the shape of the leaves. There are designed to shed water. Also, the palm leaves are design to collapse in the wind as well as allow the wind to pass through. In addition,

palm branches are quite flexible. In the picture in the center, we see a group of orchids. Orchids grow on trees and other plants; they do not need soil. On the right is a Corpse plant in bloom. It is their most famous plant. Theirs was not blooming when we were present (this is a good thing). The plant takes its name from the stench the 6-foot bloom emits. The picture is taken from the internet. We also learned that this plant could raise its temperature.

We then visited the pyramids that held the feature. In this case we saw the display of dinosaurs. It was interesting to note that a number of the plants present in this pyramid were around when dinosaurs walked the earth. Here are some pictures from this pyramid:



The final pyramid was the temperate zone. The plants found in this area had to adapt to winter, that is, periods when the plant must rest. Due to the change in season the trees in the temperate zone have rings which are created by the changing growth rate. The trees in tropical zone do not have rings, because they do not go dormant. She pointed out Wollemi pine, which were once believed to be extinct until a small grove was discovered in Australia, it was a living fossil. Our guide also spoke about their aphid control program that includes releasing ladybugs. One plant we saw was the Ginkgo tree these trees apparently survived an atomic blast. Here are a few pictures from the pyramid:



I barely touched the extensive material we heard from our guide. We enjoyed the time and as mentioned in the opening please visit. For more information on Muttart Conservatory check the website.

Enjoy yourself and stay safe.