Myth: Medication Is Not Trading One Addiction for Another

I'm here today to talk about something very important about medication and addiction recovery. You know, medications are not trading one addiction for another.

They're actually medical treatment. I am Dr. Arun Pedesta. I help people recover from addiction using evidence-based, compassionate care. And today I want to set the record straight on a myth that keeps far too many people from getting the help they need.

Even today, when we have decades upon decades of science, of proven treatments and real-world results, people still hesitate to use medication in addiction recovery.

And it's not only individuals with addiction that might hesitate. It's family members too. Its therapists, its medical professionals as well. Not because it doesn't work, but because of shame and because stigma and the deeply ingrained idea that real recovery should happen without help.

that if someone takes medication like buprenorphine, like naltrexone, acamprosate, vupropion, methadone etc., they might not really be in recovery. They're just trading one addiction for another.

But let me ask you something. If your loved one had a heart condition and their doctor prescribed a daily medication that helped their heart stay stable, would you tell them to stop taking it and overcome it with willpower?

Absolutely not, because we understand that some conditions require ongoing medical support. We understand the organs sometimes need help to function properly, and the brain, it's no different.

How Medication Supports Brain Recovery

When addiction, when substance use, from chronic substance has changed the way the Brain actually works, the Way the Brains handle stress, pleasure, memory, the way survival instincts are routed, medication can help bring it back into balance.

Taking medication in recovery is absolutely not giving up. It's not cheating. Its not replacing one high with another. its recognizing that addiction is a medical condition and like other medical conditions, it sometimes needs medical care.

And the real tragedy, when people believe the myth, they don't get the care that they need. They try to tough it out. White knuckling through withdrawal, hiding their struggles, pushing away help because they're afraid of being judged.

And in the worst cases, they don't make it, and that's the cost of the myth. So if you've ever wondered, or if someone's told you that using medicines means you're not really in recovery, I want you to hold on to this.

That belief isn't just outdated, it's dangerous. And we're going to break it down right now. Let's clear this up once and for all. When someone takes a medication as part of their recovery, here's what's actually happening.

They're not getting high, they're no numbing out, They are stepping off the roller coaster because the addiction is a cycle. It's using, crashing, withdrawal, craving, seeking, and using again.

And that constant up and down puts the brain under repeated stress and over time causes damage to the brains cells, to systems that regulate reward, that regulates mood and decision making.

Medication, when prescribed appropriately and specifically, Medication actually helps interrupt that cycle, smooths it out, getting off the roller coaster.

Instead of living between highs and withdrawals, the brain is supported by a long-acting, consistent treatment that brings stability without spikes, without crashes.

just a steady, smooth signal that allows the nervous system to calm down and begin to heal. And that distinction matters because addiction isn't just about behavior, it's about biology.

Medication as a Bridge to Safer Recovery

It changes how the brain processes reward, how it responds to stress, and how evaluates risk. The nervous systems become stuck in overdrive during addiction.

The internal alarms never turn off. Even small triggers can feel overwhelming. And the cravings? They're actually not just mental. They are not a want, they are a need, their physical.

Now imagine trying to do therapy in that state, or to build a new routine, Or show up to work, show to relationships, care for your kids, take care of general life, while your brain is still fighting in survival mode.

and that's where medications come in. It gives the brain room to breathe, it quiets the panic signals so a person can think clearly, can sleep, could actually engage with recovery.

Its not a crutch, its a tool. In fact, for opioid addiction, medications like buprenorphine or methadone have been shown to cut the risk of overdose by more than half.

That's not just statistically significant, That's individual lives saved. For alcohol or benzodiazepine withdrawal, medical support isn't optional. It's essential because quitting cold turkey from those substances can be dangerous, even fatal, and medications make it safe.

And for other substances like stimulants, like cannabis, or even nicotine, medications can reduce symptoms like anxiety, depression, insomnia, and intense craving and they help create the condition for healing.

We do this with other health concerns all the time. we support the thyroid, we regulate blood pressure, We balance blood sugar. Why should addiction be treated with anything less than the same respect?

So no, medication is not the enemy of recovery. It's often the bridge to recovery. And when this is part of a bigger plan, alongside therapy, structure, connection, purpose, nutritional support, inflammation support gut health, etc.

It does not replace the work.

Using Medication as Part of a Full Recovery Plan

It makes the work possible. So now that we understand what medication really does, the question is, how do you use this knowledge? Before we dive in, if this message is helping you see addiction and recovery in a new light, take a moment to click like, leave a comment, or subscribe.

It helps more people find real evidence-based support and it tells the algorithm this is a conversation that matters. Now let's get back. If you're in recovery or starting to think about it, or if someone you love is navigating that path, here's what I want you to know.

Recovery is not about proving you can do it all on your own. It's about finding the right tools to help your brain heal, your body stabilize, and your life move forward.

And sometimes medication is one of those tools. So if you are the person in a recovery, talk openly with your doctor

or treatment team what options are actually available.

There's no shame in asking for medical support. In fact, it's one of the strongest things you can do. And if you're a family member or a loved one, you have a powerful role too.

You can help make this process safer by encouraging treatment. by checking in about medications, and most of all, by letting them know this, you're not taking the easy way out.

You're doing what's necessary to survive and to heal. And if someone has prescribed a medication, support them in taking it consistently, just like you would if they were managing diabetes or a heart condition, because consistency is what gives the brain time to rebalance.

Here's the real truth. Recovery is a process, not a performance. Whether that includes medication therapy, community, spirituality, all of the above. What matters is that it works.

That it leads to more stability, more safety, and more connection, that more purpose, it helps someone stay alive and stay engaged long enough to build something new.

Before we wrap up, I want to bring it back to something simple. Taking medication in recovery is not about a weakness. It's not giving up. Its about giving your brain the support it needs to heal.

It's about staying alive long enough to do the deeper work. And it's reclaiming your life with every tool that helps you move forward. You deserve treatment that's grounded in science, in compassion, and in real results.

That includes medical care. So if you've been carrying around shame, or if someone you love has felt afraid to take that step, Let this be the moment you release that weight.

Recovery is not about doing it right. It's about what works. I'm Dr. Arwen Podesta.