

Written Testimony

for

Mr. Avi Israel

My name is Avi Israel. I'm here to speak for my son Michael David Israel. . Michael was every body's dream child: he never got in trouble and was a very compassionate sensitive young man. Michael took his life, at the age of 20, on June 4, 2011. My only boy put a shotgun under his chin. He shot himself. Michael took his life because our health care system failed him, as it is failing countless others every day.

Michael was struck with Chrones disease at the age of 12 and fought it courageously for as long as he could. At the age of 18 Michael transitioned from pediatric to adult G.I. That, in my opinion is when the caring stopped. Michael became another file; just another spoke in the wheel of chronic disease. Rather than find the source of Michael's pain, all three of his doctors, supplied Michael with a plethora of drugs. Three different doctors who never spoke to each other and didn't communicate with each other regarding Michael's care; the sad part is that two of them are in the same practice.

His surgeon prescribed hydrocodone; our family doctor prescribed xanax ; and his G.I. doctor prescribed Cymbalta and 18 other drugs for Chrones disease. All of this medication was prescribed to an 18 year old kid, who weighed at the time of his death, 107 pounds.

My wife Julie and I accompanied Michael to the doctors and not once, and I'm going to say it again, not once did any of them ever inform Michael or my wife and me the medications he was taking were highly addictive and had severe side effects.

In December, of 2010, Michael sat on my bed and said “pops, I have problems with my pain pills. I think I’m addicted”. I did not know the severity of the problem, and replied “Okay Michael, we’ll tell the doctor next week when we see him.” The following week I informed his surgeon of Michael’s concern and got a pat on my shoulders, with a comment that “Michael needs his pills now”. I was politely dismissed.

In January, 2011, Michael was admitted to the hospital. He needed an ileostomy surgery. At that time Michael weighed 95 pounds. For the month of January and February Michael was being fed highly addictive pain killers like morphine and dilaudid. Again, we brought up the issue of addiction with his doctor and his doctor said “Michael will be weaned off before he leaves the hospital”. At the end of February Michael left the hospital with an ileostomy bag and a prescription of hydrocodone with 3 refills on it: each refill was 240 pills.

So... that’s how the doctors took care of my son’s addiction problems.

During Easter week, 2011, Michael asked to enter a detox center. We called our insurance company and were given names of three facilities. After making phone calls for a week we finally got him admitted to an adult facility. This is one of the biggest failures in the health care system. In case you don’t know there’s a severe shortage in this country for rehab facilities for young adults ages 18 to 25. So, Michael had to spend 5 days in the detox facility with people who roamed the street and drugs was a way of living for them; and here’s a kid who came out of private schools, who was studying architecture at the University of Buffalo, only weighed 95 pounds, with an ileostomy bag spending 5 days in a detox center which scared the hell out of him.

On May 15, 2011, Michael tried to commit suicide. He sent me a text which said “you do not deserve a son like me. I love you.” He locked himself in the garage with the motor running. Luckily I got a hold of Julie; she called him, and was able

to talk him out of it while I raced home, frantically calling 911. When I got there, Michael was out of the garage talking to a police officer. Michael was transported to our county hospital, and here's another failure in our system: Michael was released after 8 hours. He really should have been held there for 72 hours for observation.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, Michael asked his opiate counselor for help and to be admitted to a facility. He was getting tired of fighting the craving. After five minutes and 47 seconds the counselor called back, and told Michael "there are no beds available" for him. Michael handed me the phone; I asked the young lady "what should we do?" her reply was wait until Monday or take him to the county hospital.

In the meantime Michael walked to the back of the house, pulled an old shotgun, and locked himself in my bedroom. We tried to open the door; we tried to call Michael out. I heard the gun being cocked and a second later a shot followed. I kicked the door open and noticed blood all over the walls and the ceiling. I asked my wife to call 911. I kneeled next to my son as he was struggling to breathe and his body was shaking. Blood was pouring out of his neck. I knew that my son was not going to make it. I kissed his head and rubbed his hand. As I said I love you Michael he took his last breath. These are images that I relive every night as I try to go to sleep.

I put the blame for my son's death and thousands of other people who take their lives or overdose squarely on the shoulders of a flawed health care system which includes doctors, insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and the FDA for failure to do its' job.

In this flawed health care system, our insurance costs are the highest in the world, and we get the least amount of services for our money. Out of 40 industrial countries, we rank number 37. This is a health care system in which insurance companies dictate what services you can and cannot receive. Our insurance

companies only paid for 3 days in a detox center and refused to pay the rest, because they could not receive reports about Michael from the facilities, which according to HIPAA laws, they are not allowed to disclose any information. This system which only allows doctors to spend 15 minutes with you because that's all they can bill insurance for. Fifteen minutes per patient.

In this health care system doctors, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners can write a prescription for highly addictive narcotics without any formal training in pain management, nor any training on addiction. And the worst part is they do not inform you of the consequences of that medication.

The United States has 4.6% of the world's population, yet consumes 99.8% of hydrocodone produced in the world. 54% of young kids over the age of 14 have tried prescription drugs. That alone should tell you we have a serious problem in this country; it's not an epidemic it's a health crisis.

I am not a health expert; however, you don't have to be a health expert to see the deficiencies in our system. I would recommend that :

- Real Time Prescription Monitoring System like the I-STOP system in New York State be implemented across the country including an electronic medical records system that connects all 50 states and every medical provider. We do not have electronic medical records system in this country which connects all 50 states.
- We need mandatory continuing education for all prescribers tied to a DEA license renewal on the dangers of opioids.
- Opioids should only be prescribed for severe pain where it has been proven that other, non-addictive analgesics and treatment programs are not effective for treating that pain. While we believe it is fair that the Pharmaceutical companies are responsible to pay for such education, they must not influence said education, and that education provisions must be provided by

nonbiased, neutral parties such as drug and alcohol addiction experts.

Furthermore doctors must be educated to recognize addiction and provide resource information for those patients to receive services for those addictions.

- We need to make sure that our population is educated when it comes to narcotics and opiate pain killers. If people knew they were being prescribed synthetic heroin they would be hesitant to take, or stay on that medication.
- We must institute electronic prescriptions rather than paper prescriptions for narcotics. This would create more control over the products.
- All pharmacies must be mandated to report in real time drugs dispensed and communicate in real time with other pharmacies. I personally was able to get, for 9 months, the same controlled substance from 2 different doctors and 2 different pharmacies and pay cash for it, and I did it again last month by getting two prescriptions for Xanax on the same day hours apart. That should not happen in this country.
- The FDA as a watchdog agency has failed in its responsibility to citizens of this country. This agency should be free of influence from pharmaceuticals or any other interest groups. Until that happens we are going to keep losing people in this country due to the negligence of the FDA. The influence of pharmaceutical companies on the FDA has been well established, and well known. The FDA should change its' classifications for opioids.

Hydrocodone should be upgraded to Schedule II, and all opioids should only be prescribed for severe pain only. The FDA should institute a program for public service announcement to educate the American public on the dangers of narcotics to be paid for by the pharmaceutical companies, just as the tobacco companies.

These are simple recommendations that should not offend anybody. However, we must always hold people above profits; not the other way around. Until we do that we are going to lose more Michaels every day.