

ARRT Book Club Study

Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic by Sam Quinones

Monday, August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017

2-3:15 p.m.

Deerfield Public Library

11 participants

Leader: Melissa Stoeger

Notetaker: Elizabeth Hopkins

- Melissa began the discussion by sharing a NoveList genre outline titled: "Getting Up to Speed in Society and Culture." Our discussion title, Dreamland, was listed as a "key title" in this guide. Melissa then asked: Were you aware of the prevalence of this issue?
  - Not to this extent. Prescribing pain meds is such a prevalent part of the U.S. I didn't realize the direct link from prescribed meds to heroin.
  - I certainly didn't realize the *extent* of these issues.
  - This opens up a lot of discussion for parents and what they should be looking for re: warning signs.
- Was there anything in this book that really surprised you?
  - I was surprised to learn that this is a very entrepreneurial process from Mexico.
  - I was surprised that they were all from that small town. Also the idea of providing quality customer service.
  - Yes! The discussion of customer service felt like some of the training we get at staff development day.
  - I thought it was interesting that the dealers weren't addicts themselves.
- What did you think about the fact that it takes 2 years for dopamine receptors to start working naturally again?
  - The treatment and insurance don't match up. Treatment is only 28 days (covered), but it really takes two years.
- Most of the heroin pioneers (not the drivers) were sons of farmers and pretty well off by their standards. So why did they choose to get into this risky business?
  - Well, it wasn't risky at first.
  - They didn't want a life of physical labor. This was easier work with more lucrative payment.
  - I think it was also appealing with a certain sense of prestige in going to the U.S.
- What did you think of the Xalisco boys and their participation in the opiate business? Do you have sympathy for their reasons?
  - I think the strength of his writing was feeling sympathy for these young drivers. I was surprised to feel sympathetic. I felt like these were nice, good guys just trying to make a living.

- That was the strength of the whole book. We have a polarized view of drug addiction- this showed the human side.
- Returning to the rancho was the point of going to America. Why do you think they wanted to return home? When/why did that change from the idea of moving to America to pursue a better life?
  - These were young kids who didn't really experience America. They just worked their jobs which were a means to an end.
  - Nostalgia. Home is home. You want to go back due to loyalty to family.
- Why do you think the Xalisco boys method of dealing was so successful? Did their no violence rule help them succeed?
  - It was all about convenience and price. I appreciated the comparison to pizza delivery.
  - Geography played a role as well. They were strategic with their territory. Also with their clientele- they only did business with white people.
  - Another note: it was interesting to see the racism in the business. i.e. how they wouldn't sell to black customers because they were afraid of violence.
  - Their method reminded me of an American self-made business...like Mary Kay.
- Heroin is not used in Nayarit. It is seen in an even worse light than it is here. Why do you think? Why don't the Mexicans succumb to the drug they are selling?
  - Interesting because cocaine and meth are a different story- those are used in Mexico. Maybe because you shoot up heroin?
- Do you think freedom from pain should be a universal human right? Should pain be considered a fifth vital sign?
  - No. Not without consequence.
  - Think about all of the drug commercials for pain killers...why do we do this?
  - \*The group also discussed how several of us were given pain meds for dental procedures very freely, easily.
- Why were doctors so willing to give out pain meds to demanding patients, but not willing to demand that they eat better, exercise, lose weight in order to feel better?
  - Doctor-patient education takes time. You can't do this properly during a 15 minute appointment.
  - There is a huge need for a longer interview from the doctor to check for signs of addiction.
  - You need mental health counseling and education with these prescriptions. You can't just trust a patient to know better.
- Do you think the medical community was implicit in propagating this epidemic? Which parts? Dr. Jick? What about the FDA? Insurance companies?
  - I couldn't believe the huge conflict of interest re: doctors receiving gifts

- Interesting that this topic wasn't more thoroughly discussed in medical school.
- What do you think about the pharmaceutical industry? Do they go too far in advertising today? Do they have any responsibility?
  - The pharmaceutical industry is completely money-driven. They don't care about the actual patient.
  - They are allowed to go too far with advertising. The side effects are listed too quickly among beautiful images. Why is this even on TV? And these advertisements are long- like a short movie!
- Does Europe have this addiction problem like we do?
  - The health system is more controlled there. You can't get much of anything over the counter.
  - There's more homeopathic/natural doctors in Europe, which are hard to find here. We've been taught those are crazy hippies in the U.S. (laughter).

\*\*\*Additionally, Melissa Stoeger graciously shared all of the questions she created for this discussion. Please see the complete list below:

### **Dreamland by Sam Quinones**

Opiate: derives directly from opium poppy (heroin, morphine)

Black tar: semi-processed opium, more potent than white powder because it is cut less

Opioids: synthesized or derived indirectly from poppy (Oxy)

Were you aware of the prevalence of this issue? Was there anything in this book that really surprised you?

2 years for dopamine receptors to start working naturally again!!

Did this book challenge your conceptions of the opiate epidemic?

### **MEXICO**

Most of the heroin pioneers (not the drivers) were sons of farmers and pretty well off by their standards. So why did they chose to get into this risky business?

What did you think of the Xalisco boys and their eater participation in the opiate business? Do you have sympathy for their reasons?

Returning to the rancho was the point of going to America. Why do you think? When/why did that change from the idea of moving to America to pursue a better life?

Why do you think the Xalisco boys method of dealing was so successful? Did their no violence rule help them succeed?

Were you surprised by the Mexicans' racists ideas of blacks?

Heroin is not used in Nayarit. It is seen in an even worse light than it is here. Why do you think? Why don't the Mexicans succumb to the drug they are selling?

### **MEDICAL/PHARMACEUTICALS**

Do you think freedom from pain should be a universal human right? Should pain be considered a fifth vital sign?

Can opiate painkillers be used without risk of addiction?

Why were doctors so willing to give out pain meds to demanding patients, but not willing to demand that they eat better, exercise, lose weight in order to feel better?

Why do you think it took so long for the medical community to figure out how addictive opiates were? (Functioning addict)

Do you think the medical community was implicit in propagating this epidemic? Which parts? Dr. Jick? What about the FDA? (allowed Oxycontin to claim a lower potential for abuse because of time-release formula) Insurance companies? (with regard to rehab, they don't see virtue in multidisciplinary care, p. 308)

What do you think about the pharmaceutical industry? Do they go too far in advertising today? Do they have any responsibility? Purdue markets Oxy so hard in areas w/high levels of Medicaid.

Do you think Purdue and Pfizer were punished sufficiently? (Pfizer's fines equaled less than 3 weeks of the company's sales)

What do you think caused some officials to start taking notice of the deaths? (Before it was just inner city Blacks dying, now it's white middle/upper class)

"When your kid's dying of leukemia, the whole community shows up...When your kid's on heroin, you don't hear from anybody, until they die." (p. 290) Why do you think this is true? Why is there such silence around this issue?

### **CAUSES**

Do you agree with the idea that small local businesses would have been able to fend off shoplifters better than Wal-Mart?

Why do you think the majority of addicts tend to be women, middle/upper class, white?

Mining-retire @45 w/black lung and disability allowed for ability to live-"life strategy." Coal jobs disappeared, so did SSDI. People moved on to welfare-which was less \$\$, but they got a Medicaid card; Big Oxy use in Ohio, WV, eastern Kentucky

What did you think about Quinones thesis about the reasons the opiate epidemic has gotten so bad (Americans are no longer engaging with their communities, kids are shut up inside, we focus on material goods as the way to happiness)?

Excess contaminates America. "Man's decay has always begun as soon as he has it all-free from friction, pain, deprivation"

Matt's generation could not navigate life's demands and consequences. American kids had enormous quantities of the world's resources lavished on them to little result. Safe spaces and keeping young adults from experiencing emotions?

What is Dreamland (or the American Dream) for Mexicans versus Americans?

Do you think it's better to keep pain clinics going than to have black tar heroin on the streets? Do you agree that treatment is a better option than building more prisons? And if so, should more funding be geared toward it?

What do you think the future looks like for heroin addiction in this country?

Can you use a book like this for your discussion without getting political?

Do people want social issue book discussions?