

Ethics after Hours



Motorcycle Crash Shows Bioethicist the Dark Side of Quitting Opioids Alone **Podcast**

Summary:¹ Travis Reider is a bioethicist at the Berman Institute of Bioethics, at Johns Hopkins University. In 2015 he had a motorcycle crash and severely injured his foot. Following the crash, he underwent 6 surgeries to reconstruct his foot. During treatment he received opioids for pain management, and experienced severe withdrawal symptoms when trying to come off them. In this podcast episode he talks about his experience with pain and being on a heavy dose of opioids for pain management. He reflects on issues including addiction, stigma associated with opioid use, pain management, and the moral responsibility of doctors to do good and to do no harm.

Duration: 43 min.

With: Terri Gross and Travis Rieder

Fresh Air, NPR podcasts.

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Available here: [Travis Rieder's 'Pain' Tells Of Bioethicist's Lonely Struggle To Quit Opioids Alone : Shots - Health News : NPR](#)

Ethics Themes:

Stigma

Non-maleficence

Moral responsibility

Addiction

Beneficence

Over-prescription

Questions for discussion:

- Travis Rieder got poor advice from the plastic surgeon on how to taper off his pain medication. Were you surprised to hear that a lot of doctors know how to prescribe pain medication, but have little experience or training in management of withdrawal symptoms and in tapering patients off pain medication? Why/why not?
- In your opinion, who's responsibility is it to advise the patient on how to taper off from opioids for pain management? The surgeon, the family physician, other health care providers?

¹ This podcast interview is based on Travis Rieder's book In Pain. Published by Harper in 2019.

- Travis Rieder argues that there is a need for system changes to hold prescribing doctors accountable in terms of helping patients tapering off pain medications after surgery. Do you agree?
- Travis Rieder mentions issues such as limited insurance coverage for physiotherapy as an example of a systemic factor contributing to patients' overuse of opioids for pain management. What other systemic factors may directly or indirectly contribute to the current opioid epidemic?
- What are the ethical implications of tightening the regulations around prescription of high doses of opioids? (consider how this might impact patients who are already on high dose opioids for pain management, and how it might impact the doctors' responsibility towards their patient and their ability to treat them)