

Stop Stigma Now: Small Organization Rises to Raise Funds for Methadone Treatment PR Campaign

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Stop Stigma Now, a small group of retired opioid treatment program (OTP) providers has a big—and honorable—goal: eradicating stigma against the methadone treatment field. It began about five years ago with the closure of the Mount Sinai Narcotics Rehabilitation Center in New York City, recalls Joycelyn Woods, project coordinator with the National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery (NAMA Recovery).



The physician and administrator who led that program got together and started talking about the fact that the stigma situation isn't any better than it was in 2007. "It's worse," said Ms. Woods. "Nobody is going to do anything about it unless we do something about it ourselves. I had hoped for a long time that the federal government would do it—they have the money and the resources."

Sy Demsky, the former administrator at Mount Sinai (he retired shortly before the closure), and Philip Paris, MD, the physician, helped organize the Stop Stigma Now group. "Their idea is to raise money from new sources and create a huge PR campaign," said Ms. Woods. One suggested way of raising money was to ask OTP patients—each of whom would contribute one dollar. "The programs have to decide whether to cooperate. This could be impossible to manage," she said.

This leaves Stop Stigma Now in a difficult position—doing something very important, without adequate funding to make it happen. With prescription opioid abuse rampant, OTPs and state substance abuse agencies seeking to address this are faced with new zoning restrictions or outright prohibition based on prejudice or unfounded fears.

"We wish to let the public see our patients as the successes so many of them are," Dr. Paris told *AT Forum* in an e-mail. "Our patients are dependent on their medication, not addicted," he said. "They are not substituting methadone for their street drug. Instead, methadone helps to correct the illness induced by years of using heroin or abusing pain medications."

Stop Stigma Now attended the AATOD conference in Las Vegas, prominently passing out buttons and letting the addiction treatment field know about their work. "We were received warmly with a show of support by many of the leaders in the field," said Dr. Paris. "We received many pledges for future financial support. That is very important if we are to be able to widen our anti-stigma message."

To find out more about Stop Stigma Now, and to make a donation, go to <http://www.methadone.org/stopstigmanow/>.

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