

TESTIMONY

of the

**COLLEGE ON PROBLEMS OF
DRUG DEPENDENCE**

Before the

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
LABOR – HHS – EDUCATION**

On the

FY 2007 APPROPRIATIONS

March 30, 2007

2358 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you very much for giving The College on Problems of Drug Dependence the opportunity to testify before you today.

First, we thank the Subcommittee for its previous support of the federal investment in the National Institutes of Health (NIH). To ensure that progress is sustained, we join the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research in supporting an FY 2007 appropriation of \$30 billion for the NIH, a 5% increase over FY 2006 as well as a 5% increase for the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Our College is the oldest organization in the world concerned with the devastation the disease of drug abuse causes in our society especially in terms of human suffering but also in terms of the tremendous social and economic strains. Our College is composed of scientists, physicians, nurses and other health professionals committed to solve this disease. Very significant progress has been made in recent years. The question is often asked here in Congress "What has been the progress as a result of the doubling of the NIH budget just a few years ago?" Unfortunately advances in research are less than immediate. Here are some examples of the progress that has been made in recent years directly due to funding that you and your colleagues in congress appropriated to support the research agenda of The National Institute on Drug Abuse. One example is the development of medications which reverse the life threatening decrease in respiration caused by an overdose of heroin. These medications have saved many young lives in emergency rooms throughout this country and throughout the world. As a young man said during a recent staff briefing right in this building "I died four times one night and they brought me back." He had a heroin overdose and at age 16 he saw one of his friends die from an overdose of heroin. He knows that naloxone, naltrexone and buprenorphine

were all developed as a result of medical advances funded by NIDA and these medications saved his life and could have saved his friend.

The recent passage of the Drug Addiction Treatment Act has allowed, for the first time in history, drug addicts to obtain the treatment they need right from their physician's office. This Act of Congress was only possible because of NIDA's support in developing buprenorphine, which significantly decreases craving and can prevent overdose from heroin and the widely abused prescription pain killers such as Oxycontin. Because abused prescription pain killers such as Oxycontin have become such a serious problem in this country today, NIDA has also developed other medications to replace oxycontin and relieve severe pain without the abuse potential and therefore the potential for diversion. This means that for the first time those dependent individuals who did not go to a public clinic for their treatment because such exposure would be a deterrent to their career can now be treated in private. This is an outstanding example of how Congress and the scientific community worked well together and with our whole health care system for the good of society.

NIDA has also developed treatments to reduce the craving for other drugs such as nicotine, a substance with high addiction potential and other life threatening complications. The number of lives saved by these and other treatments developed from the research supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse is monumental. There is absolutely no question now that, treatment for addictive diseases work.

In spite of these life saving advances, the challenge of addictive diseases is expanding. Younger and younger children are abusing newer chemicals such as the marked increase in the inhalation of household chemicals, the marked increase in the abuse of

methamphetamine and the rapid increase in the abuse of prescribed drugs, which is approaching epidemic levels. There is still much to be done if we are to cure more aspects of this disease.

Funding the research to continue these important advances in understanding and treating these diseases, is unique. Eighty-five (85%) of all the research in world in this field is supported by The National Institute on Drug Abuse. That is, there are no other governmental agencies, private foundations or other organizations to fund this research. Other diseases have these other mechanisms to supplement federal funding. Some individuals do not remember or consider that drug abuse is a disease similar to many other diseases. People with these brain diseases are not able to function normally, and instead feel sick, are often incapacitated and even die from these diseases at tragically young ages.

Although the financial cost of this disease is clearly not as important as the cost in human suffering and the social problems caused by drug abuse in this country, the financial cost to this country is staggering. Drug abuse costs the people of this country around \$200 billion per year. A staggering number when one considers that the total appropriation to NIDA, the agency that funds more than 85% of all the work done in this field, is less than one half of one percent of this amount. Therefore, NIDA funding is a very smart economic investment, because it markedly improves the health of our citizens and directly reduces the numerous social problems caused by this disease.

The College on Problems of Drug Dependence supports a continued investment in the National Institute on Drug Abuse at least at a 5% level. We see this as critical to continuing and expanding on the research advances made so far.

Thank you for your time. I am available to answer questions you may have now or in the future. If I do not have a response for you now I will find someone who will be able to answer any of your questions on drug abuse and drug abuse prevention.