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# Conde News



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## FROM BUSINESS OWNER TO BOTTOM AND UP AGAIN



Dr. Melanie Weiss of Watertown shares her story of prescription drug addiction.



Deputy Shane Croeni, left, and Deputy Kathy Adams, right, answer questions and share some incite on what to look for in incidences that have to do with drug paraphernalia and signs to look for with people.

Spink County Coalition is holding meetings throughout Spink County to promote safe and healthy lifestyles. They are working with the local Spink County Sheriff's department to promote awareness and to let people know that it is okay to report things that are unusual.

Dr. Melanie Weiss, from Watertown, South Dakota, knows no end to determination. Growing up in a two parent home in Watertown, she was one very determined little girl. Working hard for the grades she received, she knew in high school she wanted to be an optometrist. She had also decided by the time she was 35 years old, she would have her own business. She did not make that. Instead, she owned her own business before she was 35. She was that driven to succeed.

She was doing great in her business then everything changed. Ten years ago Melanie had three surgeries in three years. After the doctor prescribed pain relievers in 2007 after her first surgery, she thought over time that they were not working. As an optometrist, she knew she could write prescriptions. So she began to self-prescribe pain medications to 'help' her. She really felt as she was taking these medications she was "Super Mom" because they did not make her sleepy.

As time went on, she started asking her family to get prescriptions filled for her as she had a migraine, or a twisted ankle. Lying became a way of life to get the prescriptions. Melanie started justifying what she was doing, to be able to keep on the path she was on. She used whatever means she could to get medications, even family and friends.

Then her brother in law turned her in to the police. She received 12 months of probation through the optometry board. She tried to get off the Vicodin and Percocet by weeding down, switching to drugs that were not as strong or to alcohol. Nothing worked. She decided to go to California for two weeks of treatment. After two or three months, Melanie's mind reasoned that she needed to get some medications again to function. Being an active mother, she just kept on going. She became a 'highly functional' person, which became the new normal for her.

Because she made excuses for many things and lied to family, her family had no idea what she was doing. There were 'conferencés' she needed to go to. She had 'migraines', so she did not go into work. Her fellow employees were covering for her.

About a week before she was arrested, her employees had noticed a change in her and approached her husband. They told him, "Melanie says she is really stressed. We need to intervene to help her." Melanie's thoughts were always on how she could get pills for tomorrow, for next week.

One week later, she was reported to be entering a home. When she was arrested, she had other people's prescription medicines and a garage door opener that was not to her own home. After spending two days in the hospital, three days in a halfway house before they could get things set up for treatment, she went to Minneapolis for two weeks. After two weeks, they told her she would be there for three months. She never truly realized she had a problem until she entered treatment this time.

There were six felony charges against her. Through plea bargaining, Melanie was charged with one felony and some misdemeanors: She was sentenced to 180 days in the Codington County Jail with 70 days credited for treatment and time served. She is on legal probation for three years. Her license is suspended for 18 months, which will end in January, 2019. She must go to support groups and counseling. For five years, Melanie is monitored by random drug tests as well as hair samples, as they will detect drugs in your system for up to 90 days.

Deep down Melanie knew what she was doing was wrong. But her mind justified what she was doing. She became isolated, which is definitely a warning sign. She wanted to hurry home after events, just so she could get her next 'fix'.

When asked what advice would you give for people that have a problem or family members who you suspect may have a problem, Melanie says that it is okay to get help. It is okay to ask for help.

There was a gentleman, Mark, which talked about his Meth addiction. Mark described having a meth addiction was like chasing a dragon. You become confused about things. So you chase the dragon. You miss appointments. Work does not become important to you so you miss that too.

One thing about being on Meth is your anger intensifies. You go into fits of raging and fury. You are constantly looking over your shoulder. Always wondering, is the dragon chasing me?

Mark said he really got into a routine. Get high. Sleep. Wake up really thirsty. Go to the bathroom. Then you start the process all over again. You literally become a type of Zombie walking around. You are always out of money so you find ways to get some so you can start the whole process over again. Although Mark no longer does Meth, he is still working on the process of recovery.

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