SURVIVING THE STIGMA

MY JOURNEY THROUGH ADDICTION INTO RECOVERY

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James W. Follette, MD, has no real or apparent financial relationships to disclose.
THE JOURNEY

• 1987 Chief of Anesthesia, curious about fentanyl, abused for 6 weeks, fired by hospital, went to 4-month treatment program
• 1992 Medical Director of MSSNY’s Committee for Physicians’ Health
• 1993 Appointed to the Board of Professional Medical Conduct (committee on addiction)
• 2005 Asked to resign from Upstate for Tramadol use, another 3-month treatment, license restriction by BPMC
• 2006 (onward) Changed through AA and the Fellowship and volunteering
• 2009 Started a practice of Addiction Medicine and (non-procedural) Pain Management
Everything I went through, I had to go through, to get to where I am today. And I share my experience, strength and hope with my patients!
Why the stigma?

- It is hard not to judge people by their behavior.
- People in active addiction do not behave well: their behavior is not reasonable, it is controlled by emotional needs.
- Stigma feeds shame which keeps a person stuck.
How do we eliminate the stigma?

Understand that:
• Addiction is a disease: brain abnormalities have been identified
• There are predispositions to the disease
• There is a person with the disease that needs connection
• There is effective treatment
Change ("Re"covery)

- Takes time (and safety during that time)
- Requires commitment on both sides
- Mutual help helps
- It’s worth it!