

Tomorrow, April 20th, it will be two years since I lost my son, Emmett Scannell, to a heroin overdose. To say these past two years have been hard is an understatement. What is even harder though, is looking back at the eighteen months leading up to his fatal overdose and seeing all of the missed opportunities for intervention and obstacles to his recovery that he encountered.

Before I delve into that though, I would love to take a minute to tell you about my amazing son. Emmett was twenty years old and a sophomore in college. He was a computer science major attending Worcester State University on a full academic scholarship...and right up until the end he was on the Dean's list. Emmett loved BMX bikes, had recently started building his own computers and was an amazing big brother to his younger brother and sister. He was handsome, charming, outgoing, incredibly intelligent and excited to make his mark on the world. Emmett was an amazing light in our world – that is until heroin stole him away from us.

When Emmett was a sophomore in high school his father and I found out that he had been experimenting with marijuana. Eager to intervene and set him back on the correct path, his father and I encouraged his participation in a 12-step program and made certain that he got connected in the recovery community. The two years that followed were amazing to say the least! Emmett excelled academically, joined groups at school, was inducted into the national honor society, and met his high school sweetheart – life was good.

In the fall of 2014, Emmett left for college— his biggest concern leaving his high school sweetheart behind and his mom embarrassing him with tears during move-in day. Within six-weeks of beginning school – and a lack of a connection to a recovery community (there were not any supports offered on campus) – Emmett began experimenting with drugs. Shortly there after he was introduced to heroin at a party – and that was the beginning of the end.

That fall, we received an ambulance bill in the mail – little did we know that our son had been taken out of his college dorm room by paramedics and transported to a local hospital. After all, he was 18 – an adult, FERPA prohibited the college from telling us and the emergency room's interpretation of HIPAA prevented them from telling us. When we confronted him, Emmett told us the trip was because he simply passed out in his dorm room from stress and hit his head – he was embarrassed to tell us. Naively we believed him – if it was something worse, someone would have told us, right?!?

Over the next few months, we gradually learned about Em's heroin use disorder – and tried endlessly to intervene. Although, there was very little we could do to an 18yr old that didn't live under our roof. When we finally got him to agree to enter a detox in April of 2015 – we thought we saw the light at the end of the tunnel. After completing 5 days of detox, the center recommended that we place Emmett in a 30 days of treatment program – unfortunately, our insurance company did not agree with that recommendation. In their eyes, Emmett hadn't "failed at detox" yet and therefore it was not a necessity that he receive further in-patient treatment. This was followed by another detox stint, intensive outpatient therapy (that lead to more drug connections than solutions) and mismanaged MAT. I can only imagine how life would look today if appropriate treatment had been received and/or medically assisted treatment had been administered according to guidelines.

To make matters worse, after Emmett's fatal overdose on April 20, 2016 we found out that he had been seen at the hospital and revived with Narcan at least SEVEN times over the previous year - that is SEVEN missed opportunities to intervene and save this young man's life – because of a misinterpretation of

HIPAA. Again, I can only imagine how life would look today if we had been given the opportunity to intervene and address Emmett's Heroin Use Disorder during those crucial moments.