

Addiction & Recovery Capitalist – Hustlers Hawking Drugs, Hucksters Selling Recovery

“I know of no class of people who have been so victimized by the quack as the inebriate” – Quote from [Slaying the Dragon](#), William White

William White over the course of decades has documented some of our most noble efforts to expand recovery across America and our lowest lows in how people with substance use issues have been taken advantage of for material gain. He has written extensively about what he terms “snake oil sellers, hustlers and hucksters.” The unabridged list would be impossible to cover here. Perhaps the most notable sellers of bogus cures hawked the “[Keeley Cure](#)” over a century ago. It included gold injections to cure alcoholism. It became popular for a few decades and evaporated as its false promises of a cure wore paper thin. The reason these capers work nearly each and every time that they are deployed is that they are selling a lie that the public wants to buy – easy fixes with no negative side effects. The miracle elixir!



The pursuit of the magic pill got us into a real mess in the last decade. We are still in the early stages of the most devastating public health crisis in one hundred years. It was brought to us by hustlers who made billions of dollars enriching themselves at the expense of thousands of deaths and losses beyond measure as they hawked their drug on the basis of false promises. The Sackler's and their company Perdue Pharma sold their miracle pain pill, marketed as non-addicting. America bought the lies because they promised what we want, all upside and no consequences.

When the truth started to catch up with them, they did what all hustlers do, they lied, evaded and blamed the victims. Richard Sackler blamed addiction on the addicted and not the lies he told to hook them. "[Abusers aren't victims; they are the victimizers](#)" he claimed this as his company reaped the bounty from the most addictive drug on the market. The entire nation paid the price, from their customers and the families of those who bought it, to whole communities destroyed by unchecked addiction. The hustle worked for them. They were willing to say or do whatever was necessary to haul in truck loads of cash. It worked, we have the pain and even after the settlement they have many billions.

The same dynamics unfold with vape products. A recent Netflix series, [Big Vape: The Rise and Fall of Juul](#) documents how workers developed the Juul and sold it as safe, the antidote to big tobacco. The company billowed up into an economic monster, with a market valuation of over 15 billion in 2018 as they made money selling their colorful drug delivery systems to children. They became big tobacco. By 2022, the company profits had disrupted like the aerosolized mists of nicotine that came out of the kids damaged and diseased lungs who bought the lies and the product.

Cannabis has been marketed as safe and beneficial as a way to legitimize its use for medicinal and recreational use. A number of the claims in respect to benefits to the recovery processes made in recent years have been discounted. As I have noted countless times, it is not the demon drug it was portrayed as being historically, but neither is it harmless or some form of panacea for all that ails us. We should always be wary of too good to be true marketing. Time often reveals that such claims are overblown and ignore very real risks. The root of all these examples is the profit motive. It has also been used to portray people like me in the kind of recovery in which I do not use alcohol or other drugs as some kind of puritanical aberration. Just like Richard Sackler did! Shift the blame onto the impacted group. I wrote about at length in [portraying Abstinence Recovery as Puritanical Is in the Interest of Those Who Sell Addictive Drugs](#).

The Recovery Capitalist - Hucksters Selling Recovery

In respect to healing, the same dynamics of a vulnerable population with a highly stigmatized condition draws in fraudsters and charlatans on the treatment and recovery side. They market to vulnerable families and have them cash in college funds and drain retirement accounts to help a loved one heal. Their primary intervention is far too often between people and their money, the healing comes as a secondary goal, if at all. They are confidence men (and women).

They gain people's trust and then take advantage of their victim's desire for a positive outcome. They leave their victims with complex wounds as they take their money, their hope, and their capacity to trust helpers.

Some relatively recent headlines highlighting these Hucksters:

- ['The Rehab Mogul' sentenced to 52 years for assault, running \\$175 million healthcare billing scam](#)
- [Man Charged in \\$148M Medicare and Medicaid Fraud Scheme](#)
- [KARE 11 Investigates: Overbilling allegations in new program to help people in addiction recovery](#)
- [In Pursuit of Liquid Gold / there is big money in drug testing](#)
- [Drug Treatment Industry is exploiting vulnerable people, NJ watchdog charges](#)

William White, in his book [Slaying the Dragon](#) wrote about how historic conditions were "fertile ground for fraud and exploitation." The proliferation of money related to the addiction epidemic and the opioid settlement monies have resulted in similar conditions in our own era. Substance use disorders remain a highly stigmatized condition. Even in our day and age, there is not a lot of empathy and concern across our society for what happens to us. Lack of empathy and a lot of money makes our community ripe for being taken advantage of by opportunists.

History shows us that our systems tend to look the other way until they cannot avoid dealing with these scammers.

- There is a great deal of money to be made from us under the guise of "helping." It is far too often we become a means for opportunist to make money.
- Stigma etched onto people who use drugs or are in recovery is a formidable obstacle. We are not seen as worthy or competent. This means we are not often seen as worthy or taken seriously when we are taken advantage of.
- Because opportunism is quite profitable, groups making money in these ways accumulate influence on the political level and can become adept at shifting blame, just like Richard Sackler did.
- The heart of recovery is community - we are not a commodity to be profited off of in respect to recovery capitalism.

Wolves always camouflage themselves to look harmless, it is how they get into the flock. It is also true that there are few guard dogs to protect people from the wolves. Almost no one is looking for these hustlers and hucksters at any level. Even major laws enacted by Congress and signed into law by the President lack meaningful enforcement. Consider that the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) had nearly zero compliance reviews in the first fifteen years of enactment. It took having a recovering person, former Secretary Marty Walsh to get this to be a priority of our US Department of Labor. It is one of the values of having people with lived experience in policy roles. It was only then that what we all know was properly investigated and documented, that there [is widespread non-compliance with the law](#). This is our norm for laws like this and for measures to weed out hustlers and hucksters.

This is a central facet of endemic negative perceptions prevalent in society about us. Addiction is the number [one most stigmatized condition](#) worldwide. This is the thing that keeps us most vulnerable to becoming targets of groups who wish to use us as their meal ticket to wealth. We must work towards a day when we will be seen as worthy as every other community. We must insist on fair and equitable treatment. We must insist on meaningful representation. We must insist on the development of standards governed from within the recovery community to protect our vulnerable communities in of all their diversity from being taken advantage of by hustlers and hucksters.

Until stigma goes away, we must remain wary and protect each other. We should remember that if something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Authentic community does not dress up in flashy media, it wears comfortable clothes and focuses efforts on communities finding their own solutions, not a magic pill or simple sounding solution.

Sources

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The link - [HERE](#)