



Read Joe Steckler's  
Helping Seniors column  
in AL Dia Today!



## Issues related to opioid use

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This is a difficult topic to address because it covers so many needs and circumstances. Many of you know I have fought several life-threatening medical conditions, such as an ascending and descending aortic dissection, stroke, and multiple operations. These, however, have not affected my life so much as my eight-year struggle with fibromyalgia.

For many years, I have been plagued by lower back and sciatica pain. My primary care doctor has observed me for 30 years, knows my conditions, and has carefully prescribed medications for me. During this time I have seen chiropractors and pain management doctors, researched current treatments, and tried to uncover the cause of the severe pain I have suffered nearly 24/7. If you have not had such an experience, you are most fortunate because it is not something with which you want to live, though many do.

I have experienced firsthand the effects of going off various types of prescription medications. One I used was Lyrica, and after a period of time my doctor and I decided did not need the drug. I followed the doctor's directions to the letter, but still experienced about six weeks of pure H\*\*I. At times I was not certain if I would live or die. I got through it and resolved that any further attempts to come off a medication would be after much research and discussion with my doctor. After going through what I did, I learned that thousands of others had a similar experience, most often caused by coming off the medication too quickly.

My concern now is Florida law HB 21 on controlled substance prescribing that went into effect July 1, 2018. Since I have chronic nonmalignant pain, I will not be affected by the new limits on prescribing opioids. I can tell you that if I had to obtain a prescription for my medications on a 3 or 7 day basis, I would spend most of my time driving to my doctor's office and the pharmacy. The new legislation will affect those suffering from acute pain, though there are exemptions for cancer, terminal conditions, palliative care, and severe traumatic injuries.

We do have a problem with increased use of opioids. But have we directed our efforts to restrict their use in a well thought out manner? Many seniors take these drugs because, whether we like it or not, some medical conditions dictate their use for treatment. My concern when I first started using opioids was whether I would become addicted to them. Well, throughout my eight years of coping with fibromyalgia, I have used one medication that helps somewhat but tried others that did not.

We do not know what causes fibromyalgia and have not developed any specific treatment for it. I can tell you that at times my pain is difficult to handle, often reaching a level of 9/10. Does that mean I do not try to exercise or try all the well-intended ideas? I do, but little seems to help. Most important, like many others who use the medical drugs prescribed by my doctor, I have NEVER abused them.

There are many like me who believe that what was a well-intended law may actually harm those who have a medical problem. Does a group of elected officials have the requisite background to direct the use of opioids? If you experience problems obtaining medications under the new law, we ask you to call 321-473-7770 so that we may document them.

Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a non profit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at: [info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org](mailto:info@helpingseniorsofbrevard.org)

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