

NHS Western Isles has gathered stories from loved ones to raise awareness of the difficulties faced and how Naloxone can make a difference. It is important to raise awareness of the availability of this medication to ensure Naloxone reaches those who need it.

Lived experience of a loved one – story one

I did not know that my husband had a history of drug use, as it had not entered our conversations or had any impact on our lives for the first five years we were together.

Following a house move and a promotion at his work, I noticed he was taking longer to return home. I remember he would avoid face to face contact when he came in, claiming he was tired or had a headache.

I knew something was wrong, as we used to talk about everything, but attempts I made to discuss my worries made him angry, and he would say I was nagging and causing him to feel that way. Life became pretty lonely and I gave up trying to talk to him.

Four months on from his change in behaviour, I got a call from the local hospital one evening to say my husband had been taken in and I should make my way down. I didn't take in many details of that call as I went into panic, not knowing if he was going to be alive when I got there, thinking about all our recent arguments and the names I had called him in sheer frustration. On arriving at the hospital, a doctor took me aside and explained my husband had experienced an overdose, but had been revived.

I could not make sense of what I was being told. The doctor spoke as if I was aware of his drug use. I remember feeling so naive. How could I have missed the signs? Why had this happened? Was it my fault? My head was in overdrive.

I remember an intense feeling of shame, mixed with fear and anger. How could he do this, was the question which kept going through my head.

My husband was well enough to be discharged after a few days. He did not want to open up about the overdose, and I did not know what to say, so we got on with our routine in a sense of numbness.

It wasn't until we attended a Nurse appointment which had been arranged by the hospital, that I was able to listen to my husband explain what had happened. Growing up in care he had been introduced to drugs from a young age, as it was better for him to keep in with the older guys, who were also involved in supplying

drugs. He had regularly used heroin, alcohol and other stuff, but after witnessing his friend's death from an overdose he had been offered help and relocation which had helped him turn his life around.

He explained that the pressure he had been under at work, and fear he was letting his family down, was the tipping point for his behaviour. He told us he had bought Diazepam from someone at work and started to take this with alcohol at the end of his shifts. This mixed with pain medication he took for a back injury had caused the overdose by slowing down his breathing.

Talking to the nurse and being able to ask questions helped me to understand. This has helped both of us to communicate better.

My husband accepted support and got his head back on track over the following six months. He also cut down on his back medication that he admitted he was using too much of.

It's been tough for us as a family as the trust has gone. I still wonder what people are saying about us. I know it's not their business, but it's not an easy feeling to shake off. The impact of the situation will never leave me, and in a way I'm glad as it will make me more aware if something were to happen again.

Ignorance to drugs and what they can do nearly took away my husband. Having a better understanding and knowing where to turn to for support has helped us both.

We might be a small Island, but there is good help and support out there. Once you know who to trust and where to turn.

I took the naloxone training after reading a leaflet the nurse had given us. Now I carry my own pack in my handbag. I don't ever want to use it, and my husband has said he would never again put our family through the pain we experienced, but it's my little bit of security.

What helped? Knowing who to talk to in confidence.