

The High Cost Of Celebrity Health Care



By Janice R. Brenman

Stories of celebrities addicted to prescription drugs have fueled the machinery of media outlets for decades. Much like a carnival barker luring curious onlookers to a tent filled with daring trapeze artists and fire jugglers, the media circus surrounding these addicts is as sad as it is common. The public is endlessly fascinated by the downward spirals of those who have compromised their fame and fortune, due to a never ending quest to quell pain, be it physical or psychological. Many of these departed celebrities utilized enablers and facilitators to keep the supply of pills steady. Who are these enablers and facilitators? They are often friends and family members; other times, professional guardians such as doctors and lawyers who suspend their oaths to protect and defend in return for gainful employment and a position of influence within a celebrity's inner circle. Such appears to be the case with Dr. Conrad Murray and his treatment of Michael Jackson. Likewise, the entourage of Howard K. Stern, and doctors, Kristine Eroshevich and Sandeep Kapoor, and their treatment of Anna Nicole Smith.

In 2006, Smith's life spiraled — within four months she celebrated the birth of her daughter (Stern claimed to have fathered) and mourned the death of her son. Two weeks later, she and Stern performed a commitment ceremony in the Bahamas. Throughout, she was on several medications, allegedly to treat anxiety and physical pain. As time passed, Stern could see her fragile emotional state warranted extra help, so he consulted with Eroshevich, a psychiatrist, and Kapoor, a physician. This rehabilitation 'care team' was entrusted, but by what



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means? Even if it was determined she had an addictive personality, then were pills the only answer to her problems, or just a convenient one? What constitutes ethical behavior can be a slippery slope. The jury's recent guilty verdicts on several counts for Eroshevich (obtaining medication through fraud) and Stern (conspiracy-based on aiding and abetting) have delivered a minor laceration from Lady Justice's sword, but it is a start.

In some cases, the cycle of abuse can be broken. Marshall Mathers (aka Eminem) hit rock bottom, then successfully resuscitated his life and career through lucid, healthier choices. Television reality shows (for better or worse) such as "Celebrity Rehab" and "Sober House" document the trials and tribulations of those in the public eye who endeavor to improve their health. In a recently published book, "When Doctors Kill: Who, Why, and How," seasoned forensic pathologists Joshua Perper and Stephen Cina opine:

"Doctors who choose to treat celebrities are seeking out an inherently high-risk patient population. It is no wonder that they are handsomely compensated for their efforts. Nonetheless, physicians are responsible for treating their patients in a manner consistent with the accepted standard of care, regardless of who they are. It is the sworn duty of these concierge doctors to be providers of relief and appropriate therapy, not enablers of drug addiction, or, worse still, creators of addicts. By virtue of their training, doctors are more aware of the addictive potential of prescription medications than their patients...a doctor who fails to recognize tolerance (a pattern of a patient needing ever higher doses of a particular drug to achieve the same beneficial effect) is not helping the patient. There are often (though not always) viable alternatives that can be explored."

The traveling circus caravan of high-wire daredevils who either consume, provide, oversee, or administer prescription drugs forges forward, and a huge safety net from the medical profession is sometimes not taut enough to catch the falling stars without incident. Of course, this toxic dilemma is not only limited to celebrities, but given their ubiquity in the news, their trials and tribulations merely reflect what the public at large experiences daily.

The Hippocratic Oath is called into question when a physician caters to their famous patient's every whim. And in Smith's case, the man closest to her not only supported the reckless decisions of her physicians but also indulged her self-destructive behavior for reasons still

unknown. Whether the motives of Eroshevich and Stern were simply careless or, darker still, intentionally harmful, the end result remains the same. Let us hope the Anna Nicole Smith trial remains vivid in the minds of those who irresponsibly dispense pills as a first line of defense in providing care.

Celebrity	Medication	Age at Time Of Death
Dinah Washington	2 Barbituates	39
Dorothy Dandridge	Tofranil	42
Brian Epstein	Sleeping pills	32
Jimi Hendrix	Secobarbital	27
Pier Angeli	Tranquillizers	39
Bruce Lee	Equagesic	32
Freddie Prinze	Methaqualone / Quaaludes	22
Keith Moon	Clomethiazole	32
Truman Capote	Multiple drugs	59
Abbie Hoffman	Phenobarbital	52
Steve Clark	Antidepressants & Painkiller	30
Margaux Hemingway	Phenobarbital	42
Dana Plato	Soma & Vicodin	34
Kevyn Aucoin	Tylenol	40
Anna Nicole Smith	Chloral Hydrate & 11 more	39
Heath Ledger	Xanax & 6 more	28
Michael Jackson	Propofol & 2 more	50
Adam Goldstein, DJ AM	Xanax & 6 more	36
Brittany Murphy	Multiple legal drugs	32