

My name is Marv Simcakoski,

I am Jason Simcakoski's Dad. I want to start off by saying August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014 was the hardest and most painful day of my life. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't re-live that morning. I regret leaving my son in his room alone that morning only to get a call hours later that he had stopped breathing. I can't get that thought out of my head; I wish I would have been there for him. I loved my son and still do with all my heart and I miss him badly. He was proud to be a Marine and to serve his country and he loved his fellow marines. This is a summary of some of the important issues to the committee as I understand them. Over the last couple of years, Jason would tell me how frustrated he was with his weight problem and his lack of motivation to do anything. I really got to know and understand how he struggled with his addiction problem only to have it over fueled time and time again by the Tomah VA doctors. I have argued with my sons Doctors for the last 4 years about how I could see they were over-medding him. I was always told that I wasn't their patient, even though I was his Dad who truly cared about him a lot more than they did! What I would like to know is if Jason was their son, would they of had him on all of these Meds? And would they have been there, fighting for their son with the doctors, as I was with Jason? I would like one of the doctors to tell me how is it helping a patient when you give them meds to get going such as Adderall, and meds to make you tired such as Clonazepam, Lorazepam, Temazepam ? I watched Jason go up and down because he worked with us in the family construction business. He would be all hyper in the morning and then out of it in the late afternoon from all these meds that were killing him. When my son came home from one of his inpatient stays, the doctor had him on so many meds both I and Jason were confused by all the different meds he had to take. One morning, about 3 years ago his daughter informed us to check on him because he didn't seem right. She was only 8 years old and knew he wasn't right. So my other son Chad and I went to his house only to find him barely able to get up out of bed. Once he did he his skin started popping all over his entire body and his words echoed like this iiii ccccaaaaannnnnsssssssoooo, he started falling down. We called the ambulance and held him up and I kept telling him, "Jason please don't die", as we were sobbing waiting for the ambulance to arrive. He survived that time, and later I found out why that happened. Because his doctor sent him a 3 month supply of Lorazepam and he took all of them in 4 days. What made me mad, why would a doctor that works with patients, with addiction problems send a patient 3 months' worth of Benzodiazepines??????

I asked my son if he took all those meds because he wanted to die? He said he never thought about dying. He said as he took a few of them and laid back down and pretty soon his mind kept fighting him and telling him he needed more and more and pretty soon he was taking them by the handfuls not thinking of any consequences. After

this happened, his doctor started doing a real good job with my son and not giving him the Benzodiazepines and eliminating some of the other meds. My son started doing a lot better and I started giving him his meds daily seven days a week. He seemed a lot better. He was working every day starting to lose weight and was feeling better. Then one day about 1 year ago his little dog that he loved got run over by a car right in front of him and shortly after that an old friend he knew died and he started to unravel. I took him back to the VA and he had a new inpatient doctor. My wife, Jason and I, met with her and discussed my sons treatment plan. She told us that he didn't need all the meds and she was going to take him off most of them. After we left that day, we were happy. My wife and I thought she was going to be great doctor, she understood. My son stayed there for 3 months. Towards the end of his 3 month stay in 2014, he was doing real good until his doctor put him on a new drug, Geodine, then everything started to spiral downhill. His anxiety level went way up, he couldn't sleep, he started having bad thoughts, he told his doctor of all these issues, and that he didn't want to take the medicine anymore. She told him if you don't take it, you will be discharged the next morning. So he kept taking it until he couldn't take it anymore. He pulled the fire alarms and went crazy then his doctor was going to put him in a lockdown for 2 months for it. My son made a good point to me, he said, "Why am I getting punished for something she made me take? Dr. Davis then gave my son the option of going to the Madison facility or into the lockdown at the Tomah VA. He did not want to go into lock down, so he was transferred to Madison that same day. He was told there that he was over-medded on Valium and on the Geodine, and that the Geodine can make people crazy like what happened to my son. They released him the next day only to have him come home and try to wean down on these meds on his own, which I know is next to impossible. After being home for about two weeks, my son still couldn't do much more than get out of bed and eat so I took him back to Tomah VA the day after my father's funeral. And by the way, my son wasn't even able to attend his grandfather's funeral because of the withdrawals; he was supposed to be a pallbearer. He told me on the way down to Tomah that if he could be like anybody he would like to be like his brother Chad, because he was normal and didn't have all of these daily struggles like him. The last two weeks that Jason was in Tomah, he was doing ok until his doctor put him back on Geodine. He sent me a text 4 days before he died and told me he couldn't take it anymore he was going crazy and he reached out to me to help him. I called to various offices above his doctor and my son called me back and said within two hours someone was helping him. I met with his doctor the next day on Thursday with my son and a patient advocate. When we all sat down in the room his doctor turned and pointed to me and said that I caused her a lot of trouble. She said she spent 2 ½ hours in meetings because I went over her head and said she could have been taking care of my son. She also said I may know how to

build houses and pound nails but I don't know anything about taking care of my son. This really hit me hard to have his doctor tell me I don't know my son and I caused her a lot of trouble for trying to help my son who needed my help. The reason I called over her head is that my son wasn't receiving the care from here he needed. He had to write notes to the nurses to give to his doctor because she wouldn't come see him! Jason called me the night before he died and wanted me to bring his truck that next morning, he was doing a lot better. He was all excited about coming home that following Monday, for his daughter's birthday that week. I told him I would be there before 9:00 am. His wife, daughter and I arrived there before 9:00am. Usually when I come to see him he is waiting outside or upstairs on his floor for us, but this time there was no Jason. I went to the nurse's station and asked where he was and they said he was in his room with a migraine, which was strange because he never had a migraine before. So we went in his room and he was lying on his side with his hand on his head. I asked him what was the matter and when he started to talk I couldn't understand him because they had him so medded up. I went to the nurse's station and asked them why he was so medded up and the nurse told me he will be fine in a couple hours. That they gave him another med for a migraine. This med did not show up in his autopsy report this was Fioricet. I went back to his room and we stayed a little longer, he waived us off to go and he went back to sleep. We left not knowing that we would never see him alive again! Then about 5 hours later I get a call from the VA that my sons breathing stopped. They were working on him to try to resuscitate him but it was too late. He never got to drive his truck or come home for his daughter's birthday. Then I find out he was on all of these meds, when the doctor told us she was going to be taking him off most of them, I think that was insane. And later I find out they had my son on pain meds (Tramadol) and sent him a bottle of 50 to his house. So why do you put someone with an addiction to pain meds on pain meds? I can't begin to tell you how angry that makes me! I would like one of these doctors to tell me how mixing all of these drugs they had my son on was going to do him any good! Why doesn't the director of the VA facility take the blame for all of this, isn't he in charge? I'm an independent contractor in the Stevens Point area and when anyone that works under me on my jobsite does something wrong, I am responsible because I am in charge. If this facility will not take responsibility for its wrong doing, then I think this system is totally screwed up. I think all who had a part in my son's death should be held accountable, if they aren't then what kind message are we sending? It's not ok to have a patient die in the mental health ward, because of being over medded by the doctors and no one is at fault. If after today's hearing, nothing major gets changed, then I think people will lose faith in our Government. Let's not let all of this fade away, let's make some historic changes that we can all be proud to be a part of. Give these veteran men and women a fighting chance for a bright future instead of a cloudy one from being

over medded so they know what it feels like to be normal. I think this is going to be a great chance to have all government parties' work together to show the veterans they all really do care. After all, these people should be the most important priority to all of us because they are the real life heroes of this country! I am proud my son was veteran and he will always be my HERO!!!!