

CEO

Dr. Robert Graessle walks alongside those battling addiction at Franklinton recovery center

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Dr. Robert Graessle, *Columbus CEO's* 2022 Healthcare Achievements Healthcare Trailblazer award winner, spent 10 years at Grant Medical Center as an emergency room doctor and for more than eight of those years, he worked nights. That was often when patients who had overdosed would come in, and Graessle would spend his shift sitting with them, and as required, send them away with Naloxone, medicine used to reverse opioid overdoses, only to see them a few weeks later.

And most days, that's the norm.

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"I witnessed the opioid crisis firsthand in a number of ways," Graessle says. "I sat with patients that had relapsed and had been fighting this, and it was kind of a losing battle for them. They were struggling. I sat with many families, telling them that their loved one didn't make it because we tried to save them, but we couldn't get them back and that they had finally overdosed and died."

So why aren't we talking about it?

That's the question that Graessle was asking himself and his peers—he would diagnose the patient with an addiction disorder but wasn't able to treat them. While looking for a solution, he came across a Yale study that showed promising results for patients treated at a Yale hospital who were then referred to an affiliated treatment center at the time of the hospital visit.

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Graessle felt hopeful in that and even tried referring his patients to nearby treatment centers, but the majority came back with the same message: there's a weeks-long wait. So he left his job and opened a facility of his own: Basecamp Recovery Center.

Basecamp Recovery opened in August 2020 and serves anyone who walks through its doors, regardless of ability to pay. It offers a multi-faceted approach of medical care, counseling and case management.

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Patients start their journey at Basecamp by showing up five days a week for the first month or two, tapering over time as they improve to allow time to attend events in the community, like support groups.

Graessle has served over 700 people in the past year.

For Graessle, a Hilltop native, opening the center in Franklinton was a no-brainer. Franklinton and the surrounding five zip codes are routinely on a list published by the state detailing highest overdose rates by location, he says. But it's not an isolated problem—during a 12-month period ending in April 2021 in the United States, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated there were 100,306 drug overdose deaths.

“In 2017, I believe overdose deaths in the U.S. was 73,000, and for perspective, those were peak numbers,” Graessle says. “At that time, that was higher than the peak AIDS deaths in 1985, the peak gun violence deaths in 1993, the peak car accident deaths in 1937, yet nobody was talking about it. Now, three years later, we're at 100,000 deaths.”

To aid in the epidemic we need more treatment centers and improvements to the existing ones. While the American Society of Addiction Medicine guidelines outline standard practices, many centers stray from it, he says. There's also a significant need to break down the stigma.

“There's a much stronger genetic component to this disease than we give it credit for,” Graessle says. “To say they're making bad choices or don't have willpower is not the proper lens.”

Basecamp has 32 employees. On the team is Dr. Bryan Borland, its medical director and an original team member who has created several programs which Basecamp follows. Thanks to

Graessle, the recovery center couldn't have a more cohesive team, he says.

"Rob is a creative thinker, he is very true to the mission and values of Basecamp," Borland says. "Because of that he has been able to create a team that is a cohesive group of individuals so focused on the mission and values."

In the future, Graessle hopes to add additional clinics in other areas in need like Linden or Whitehall. For now, he hopes to serve as many people as possible.

"I liked being an ER doc, don't get me wrong," Graessle says. "But that sense of purpose that I have today is vastly different from what I felt in the ER in my day-to-day life. I think some of that comes from giving back to my neighborhood, but it's really about being able to fend for those who are unable to fend for themselves that everyone else has counted out. And I see their potential. I see their amazing potential."

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Dr. Robert Graessle

Founder and CEO, Basecamp Recovery Center

Age: 46

Experience: Emergency room physician, Grant Medical Center; Emergency medicine physician, Van Wert Hospital

Education: B.A. in chemistry, Malone College; M.S. in exercise physiology, University of South Carolina; D.O. at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine; osteopathic internship at St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center; emergency medicine resident physician residency at Michigan State University-Kalamazoo Center for Medical Studies

Community involvement: Graessle founded Basecamp Recovery in 2020 in Franklinton to help address the ongoing opioid epidemic at a local level.

