Addiction is a Disease, Not a Moral Failure : Kerlikowske

Addiction is a disease, not a moral failure, according to Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. He is scheduled to speak about addiction and drug control policy Monday at the Betty Ford Center in California.

He will call for more alternatives to current drug policy, including early intervention through health care, better access to treatment, more support during recovery, and effective public education, The Desert Sun reports.

"Recovery is this long-term, lifelong process, with its own set of challenges and its own needs — and yet we fail to highlight that process," he told the newspaper in an interview.

In 2010, 23 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Of these, 2.6 million received treatment at a specialty facility.

Kerlikowske also will call for a review of laws that can add to the challenges of recovery, such as barriers that prevent many minor drug offenders from obtaining housing and federal student aid. His goal is to curb the growing number of prison inmates, many of whom are coping with drug abuse, while reducing the $50 billion cost of incarcerating them.

Kerlikowske will be joined by U.S. House Representative Mary Bono Mack of Palm Springs, who has been raising awareness about prescription drug abuse. Bono Mack, who co-chairs the Congressional Caucus on Prescription Drug Abuse, has introduced legislation that would revise Food and Drug Administration drug classifications to ensure that drugs containing controlled-release oxycodone hydrochloride would be prescribed only for severe pain.