

Recovery With Assistance

Shifting To A Comprehensive Approach To Addiction Treatment [Ⓟ]

(NAPSA)—Many people are aware that dependence on opioids—drugs including heroin as well as some prescription pain medications—is a national epidemic. According to a recent survey from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an estimated 2.2 million individuals in the U.S. are dependent on opioids. Every day there are new stories of lives ruined or lost to this devastating addiction.

Previously, the inability to recover from opioid dependence had been viewed as a problem of motivation, willpower or strength of character. However, scientists have proven that addiction has a biological basis whereby the repeated use of opioids can lead to physical changes in the brain. Over time, a person's brain can adapt to the regular use of opioids, leading the individual to need these drugs just to function.ⁱ For this reason, people who are dependent on opioids often find it very challenging to stop using, and those who do manage to stop often relapse after a short period of time.

So what can we do to help stem this growing epidemic of drug abuse? The first step is to understand that addiction needs to be treated as a disease. Many people don't realize that there are a number of effective treatment options available to those who are

suffering from opioid dependence. These options include various types of psychosocial support and services as well as medications. For many, the stigma associated with addiction leads people to feel reluctant about seeking help and proper treatment for their disease.

Percy Menzies, president of the Assisted Recovery Centers of America, says, "There are a number of distinct medication-assisted treatment options that have proven useful in facilitating recovery from opioid addiction. However, there is a widespread lack of awareness about the treatment options that are available for opioid dependence. Targeting the physical dependence of addiction through appropriate medications can allow a patient to focus on the psychosocial aspects of recovery."

Research has shown that combining medication with psychosocial support is a comprehensive way to help patients try to beat their addiction, and including medication with psychosocial support is now considered the optimal evidenced-based approach.ⁱⁱ Of course, there are no miracle cures. Treatment plans must be tailored to address each patient's drug addiction patterns and drug-related medical, psychiatric and social problems, and patients should discuss with their

providers what's best for them.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Nicole K., a 37 year-old former heroin addict and mother of three, "I used heroin for several months. I tried many routes to treatment and eventually relapsed every time. However, medication along with counseling truly worked for me."

Along with counseling, different types of medications may be useful for different patients. For example, some medications, such as buprenorphine and methadone, mimic opioid use. Other medication options, such as naltrexone, block the effects of opioids.^{iv}

Types of psychosocial support include cognitive and behavioral therapy as well as mutual support groups. The cognitive therapy approach helps addicts recognize and dismiss self-defeating attitudes that make life seem unbearable without the drug, while behavioral therapies address a patient's motivation to change and provide incentives to stop using.^v Mutual support groups including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and 12-step programs foster comfortable environments to share experiences with dependence and motivate patients to stay drug free. Research shows that psychosocial support along with medications helps people remain in treatment.ⁱⁱⁱ

For more information on opioid dependence and its treatment, please visit: www.recoveryispossible.com.

ⁱ Williams JT, MacDonald JC, Manzoni O. Cellular and synaptic adaptations mediating opioid dependence. *Physiol Rev*. 2001; 81: 299-343.

ⁱⁱ National Quality Forum. Evidence-Based Treatment Practices for Substance Use Disorders. http://www.apa.org/divisions/div50/doc/Evidence_-_Based_Treatment_Practices_for_Substance_Use_Disorders.pdf. Posted 2005. Accessed August 11, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Institute on Drug Abuse. Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction. <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/treatment-recovery>. Last updated August, 2010. Accessed December, 2013.

^{iv} Cavacuiti C. (Ed.). (2011). Principles of Addiction Medicine: The Essentials. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

^v National Institute on Drug Abuse. Seeking Drug Abuse Treatment: Know What To Ask. http://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/treatmentbrochure_web.pdf. Last updated June, 2013. Accessed December, 2013.