WL 316

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

Addiction: A Community Crisis

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Communities plagued with substance abuse are filled with feelings of fear, frustration and even hopelessness.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that opioids – a class of drugs that include prescription pain medications and heroin – were involved in 28,648 deaths in 2014. Closer to home, West Virginia has one of the highest opioid prescription rates with an average of 138 prescriptions written for every adult. The statistics are both alarming and dangerous. Communities plagued with substance abuse are filled with feelings of fear, frustration and even hopelessness.

The fact is that substance abuse is a non-discriminatory epidemic. Individuals from every socioeconomic background, academic level and ethnicity are impacted by addiction. A common misconception exists within communities across the U.S. that those who struggle with drug addiction are morally flawed, weak individuals who voluntarily spend their day chasing their next high. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Addiction as defined by the National Institute on Drug Abuse is a chronic, often relapsing brain disease that causes compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences to the addicted individual and to those around him or her.

The method through which addiction develops is a complex one. The "feel good" sensation created by the release of dopamine trains the brain to repeat the behavior responsible so that the pleasurable feelings are repeated. In the case of opioid abuse, the receptors in the brain become overloaded with dopamine each time the abuser engages in drug use. The continued use of opioids causes changes in the process through which the brain receives and communicates messages.

What Can Communities Do?

Risk factors for addiction include environment, social pressures and mental illness. If your loved one displays any of the following signs, they may have a problem with substance abuse.

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Physical

- Blood shot eyes
- Blank stares
- Slurred speech
- Inability to hold balance
- Unkempt appearance
- Unexplained sores on face and body

Behavioral

- Fighting
- Decrease work performance
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Suddenly withdrawn or secretive
- Change in friends
- Missing valuables, money or prescription drugs
- Constant borrowing of money
- Loss of home or vehicle

Psychological

- Mood swings
- Personality change
- Paranoid
- Hallucinations

The Road to Recovery

If you suspect your loved one may be suffering from addiction there are ways to help them.

- **Understand** that the addicted person cannot voluntarily stop using drugs immediately. The science of addiction diminishes the ability to resist the urge to use drugs; however, it is possible to successfully recover from substance abuse.
- **Seek** professional help. Several publicly-funded substance abuse recovery programs exist within the state.
  - Call 1-800-662-HELP or visit *www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov* to locate a recovery program near you.
- **Dispose** of unwanted or unused prescription drugs.
  - Visit the Drug Enforcement Agency website at *www.dea.gov* to locate a drug disposal center near you and learn of ways to properly dispose of unused or unwanted medications in your home.
  - Learn more about Drug Take-Back Day opportunities within your community by visiting *www.dea.gov*.
- **Share knowledge** with community members about addiction. By educating yourself and your neighbors about addiction, communities can begin to enjoy drug-free communities.
- **Advocate** within your community.
  - Host a recovery support group at your church or civic organization headquarters.
  - Host a community showing of the film, "The Anonymous People" *(manyfaces1voice.org)*.
  - Join the governor's initiative on substance abuse *(www.wvsubstancefree.org)*.
- **Support** those struggling with addiction. It is important for them to be surrounded with people who believe in their ability to achieve long-term recovery.

For more information on opioid use and treatment options, visit *www.hhs.gov/opioids*.

Activity: Word Search

B	A	G	E	P	D	R	U	G	B	V	S
W	D	G	I	A	M	E	Y	T	N	U	X
Q	D	M	M	D	O	P	A	M	I	N	E
G	I	M	T	R	E	C	O	V	E	R	Y
J	C	A	K	E	G	B	P	C	T	J	W
A	T	A	L	M	C	R	I	R	F	C	H
D	I	S	E	A	S	E	O	I	Q	H	V
E	O	V	B	N	L	D	I	I	P	A	T
N	N	O	F	W	A	Z	D	D	O	P	U
C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	D	S	I

Addiction	Disease	Opioid
Community	Dopamine	Recovery
DEA	Drug	

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