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ADDICTION IN VARIOUS SETTINGS

People with alcohol/drug problems are varied and will be encountered in a variety of settings with a diversity of problems/symptoms. Identifying an alcoholic or a drug dependent person is not always easy. It is not possible for treatment agencies to handle this widespread problem all alone without the support of others. Social workers, psychologists, doctors, nurses, teachers and employers can play a key role in identifying and motivating addicted individuals to take help.

The following are a few indicators that can help identify people addicted to drugs.

Direct Indicators

- Appearing doped or intoxicated
- Involvement in drug related offences
- Smell of alcohol
- Observation of hand tremors, etc.
- Report of use by wife, employer, friend
- The abuser himself declares he has a problem.

We have to remain alert to hidden indicators as well.

Hidden Indicators

Identification in the Workplace

Deterioration in job performance is one of the first indicators of an addiction problem. This can be checked and confirmed through

the person's repeated

- Absenteeism
- Poor quality and quantity of work output
- Involvement in accidents
- Frequent demand for loans
- Poor interpersonal relationships at work.

Identification in the Hospital Setting

The addicted individual usually comes to the physician or health worker with medical problems like

- Gastritis
- Neuritis
- Liver disorders
- Abscesses
- Drug withdrawal symptoms (see Chapter 1)
- Sleep problems
- Psychiatric symptoms.

In some cases they may be admitted as accident victims. In all these cases, they seek help not for addiction, but only for their medical problems. Therefore, though they seek help, there will be poor compliance with addiction treatment, resulting in repeated unproductive visits.

Identification through Spouse's Behavior

Addiction leaves its impact not merely on the abuser, but on each and every member of the family. It affects the spouse — husband or wife — with the same intensity with which it affects the abuser. The spouse may feel ashamed and could also feel desperate. The following symptoms in the spouse can be indicators of addiction:

- ▶ Withdrawn and depressed
- ▶ Suicide attempts
- ▶ Poor care of self
- ▶ Bruises (due to domestic violence)
- ▶ Lifestyle not in keeping with income level.

Identification through Child's Problems

Children are also victimized by a parent's addiction. Constant exposure to a dysfunctional environment can and usually does lead to emotional problems, and these present themselves in varied forms like

- ▶ Academic performance not matching IQ level
- ▶ Lack of concentration
- ▶ Poor interpersonal relationships
- ▶ Behavior problems such as hyperactivity, rebelliousness and aggression
- ▶ Suicidal tendencies.

How One Can Help

- ▶ *Collect facts:* Help the client talk about his drug abuse — types of drug used, duration, pattern of use and damage or problems related to it. As

the client continues to talk, he will be able to look at his problem more openly and recognize the impact of addiction.

- ▶ *Involve family members:* Family members often provide details much more clearly and in a more complete manner than the drug abuser. They also view the situation much more objectively and present a realistic picture of the problem. Moreover, the very presence of family members helps keep the denial of the user at a lower level. Family members are also able to influence him to take help and motivate him to change.

- ▶ *Focus on drinking or drug use and related damage:* The goal of a motivation session is to assess the problem and motivate him to take help. Effort is made to focus on drug abuse and related problems only. Other issues like the need to strengthen family ties or continue education can be taken up later. This is done to prioritize issues, not because other issues are unimportant. By talking about too many issues in the motivation session, one can lose focus and get lost in a host of other issues which will only dilute the impact of the session.

- ▶ *Identify symptoms of addiction:* During the interview, effort is made to identify specific symptoms of addiction and help the client see the progression of his disease. Increased tolerance, loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, increasing severity of his problems and his inability to stay drug free in spite of his efforts are all issues that must be identified. Instead of simply making the diagnosis of

addiction and recommending treatment, the client needs to be helped to see the symptoms and process involved to help him accept his condition with greater ease.

- *Present disease concept:* The drug abuser and his family members often think that with a little more effort in terms of strong willpower, strict supervision, change of residence etc. one can overcome addiction. The disease concept needs to be presented to help them see how he resorts to drug use in spite of himself. The need for treatment and the ways in which treatment can benefit him need to be clarified.
- *Instill hope and confidence:* By the time the drug abuser asks for help, he is generally a broken man in body and spirit, with a future that looks very bleak. His family members are also frustrated and are very doubtful about his recovery. The counselor needs to convey a sense of optimism and stress that recovery is possible. Instead of guaranteeing recovery, the counselor needs to stress that with whole hearted involvement, commitment, family support and continued follow-up efforts, change is possible.
- *Enlist the help of a self help group member such as AA / NA:* Introducing the drug abuser to a recovering self help group member can work wonders, as he is proof that recovery

is possible. Moreover, as the recovering person has been through the pain of addiction, the drug abuser is able to empathize with him readily. As AA / NA groups can be a great source of support and encouragement in recovery, this source should be used as much as possible.

- *Refer for appropriate help:* Depending upon the severity of the problem, the drug abuser is referred for specialized addiction treatment. If addiction has not yet developed, only a few out-patient counseling sessions may be required to help him stay drug free. If the severity of addiction is very high and previous treatment efforts have not been successful, a long-term treatment program of 3-6 months may be needed. The counselor needs to follow up even after referral so that one can be sure that the client has entered into treatment.

While Referring

- Identify resources (addiction treatment center would be ideal)
- In its absence, locate a center offering medical or out-patient counseling help and make use of your skills to fill the gaps
- Provide clear directions with appropriate details about treatment centers
- Provide help immediately without delay. ■