

Shame and Stigma

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Objectives

- ▶ Understand the way that substance use affects the limbic system and contributes to ongoing substance use
- ▶ Understand how public attitudes about addiction affect people who struggle with substance use disorders and their future behaviors
- ▶ Understand how shame and stigma affect people's willingness to seek treatment

Outline

- ▶ Disease of addiction
- ▶ Neurochemistry of addiction
- ▶ Stereotypes
- ▶ Public Stigma
- ▶ Self Stigma
- ▶ Recovery

Definition of addiction

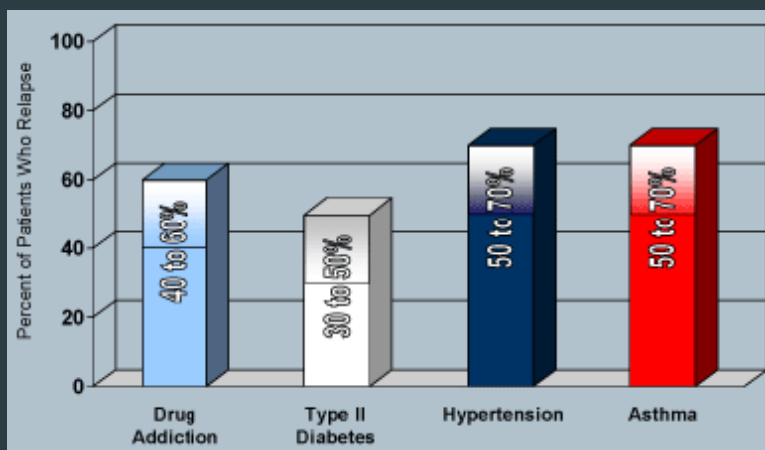
- ▶ Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences. Prevention efforts and treatment approaches for addiction are generally as successful as those for other chronic diseases.

- ▶ American Society of Addiction Medicine, October 29, 2019

The disease of addiction

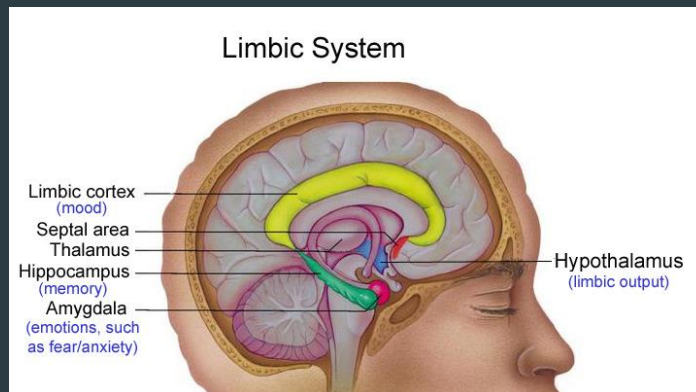
- ▶ Addiction is similar to other chronic medical problems
 - ▶ Treatment can remove or reduce the symptoms but does not affect the root cause of the disease
 - ▶ Treatment requires significant changes in lifestyle and behavior on the part of the patient to maximize the benefits of treatment
 - ▶ Relapses are likely
 - ▶ Treatment should involve regular monitoring of medication adherence as well as encouragement and support of pro-health changes in lifestyle

The disease of addiction



Neurochemistry of Addiction

- ▶ Limbic system contains the brain's reward circuitry



Limbic system

- ▶ Responsible for our perception of emotions, both positive and negative



Limbic System

- ▶ Controls and regulates our ability to feel pleasure which motivates us to repeat behaviors that we need to survive
- ▶ Activated by healthy, life-sustaining activities but also drugs of abuse
- ▶ Dopamine is the key neurotransmitter in the limbic system

<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

Dopamine

- ▶ Dopamine regulates movement, emotion, motivation and feelings of pleasure
- ▶ Drugs of abuse target the brain's reward system by flooding the circuit with dopamine producing euphoria
- ▶ When the reward circuit is activated, the brain triggers a memory and teaches us to repeat that behavior

<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

Dopamine

- ▶ Average brain - 50 ng/dL daily of dopamine
- ▶ Sex - 125 ng/dL
- ▶ Tobacco - 450 ng/dL
- ▶ Marijuana - 650 ng/dL
- ▶ Heroin- 975 ng/dL
- ▶ Methamphetamine - 1100 ng/dL

Dopamine

- With continued exposure to high levels of dopamine the brain downregulates the number of receptors and natural dopamine release
- Less receptors means that the person's ability to experience any pleasure is reduced
- This leads to ongoing drug abuse in order to try and increase the levels of dopamine

<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

Addiction does not discriminate

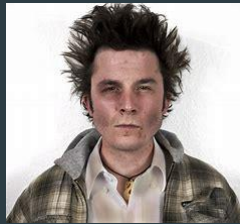


Stereotyping

- People judge one another, interpret and evaluate each other's behavior and find ways to inevitably group each other into ready-made normative categories
- Based on simplistic generalizations
- This can be harmless and useful but it becomes corrupted when those stereotypes become negative



“junkie”, “addict”, “methhead”, “dope fiend”



Stereotypical beliefs about Addiction

- “It’s a choice”
- “If you wanted to stop, you could”
- “Drug addicts are criminals. They should all be locked up”
- “Let them suffer. They deserve it”
- “Treatment doesn’t work anyway. No one gets better”
- “Medication Assisted Treatment is just replacing one drug for another”

Stigma

- Origin comes from the ancient Greek word meaning tattoo or puncture mark from the practice of branding slaves with a pointed stick
- Goffman 1963 - stigma reduces a stigmatized individual “from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one”
- Oxford English Dictionary - A mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarding as impressed on a person or thing; a “brand”

Public stigma

- ▶ Occurs when the general public endorses negative stereotypes and discriminates against a group of people
- ▶ Excludes affected individuals from public engagement by seeing them as unreliable and untrustworthy
- ▶ Public stigma of addiction has the tendency to feed into, sustain, or exacerbate the very practices it sets out to reproach

Mattews et al. "Stigma and Self-Stigma in Addiction", J Bioeth Inq (2017)

Public Stigma

- ▶ Public stigma toward individuals who use drugs found that public perceptions of dangerousness, unpredictability, irresponsibility and blame for their condition were commonly endorsed
- ▶ Core stereotypes were endorsed including dangerousness, criminality, hopelessness, worthlessness and blameworthiness

Yang, et al. "A New Brief Opioid Stigma Scale to Assess Perceived Public Attitudes and Internalized Stigma: Evidence for Construct Validity", J Subst Abuse Treat (2019)

Public stigma

- ▶ Use of substance abuse treatment programs are associated with increased stigma
- ▶ Lifetime substance use treatment was significantly associated with greater internalized stigma
- ▶ Stigma is especially high amongst healthcare workers toward patients on Methadone Maintenance Therapy

Yang, et al. "A New Brief Opioid Stigma Scale to Assess Perceived Public Attitudes and Internalized Stigma: Evidence for Construct Validity", J Subst Abuse Treat (2019)

Self Stigma

- ▶ Occurs when people internalize the negative stereotypes and believe them to be true
- ▶ Leads to shame, reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, hopelessness and demoralization
- ▶ May motivate people to continue to use in order to forget or reduce the negative feelings arising from their shame
- ▶ Pronounced in addiction

Edwin Lemert - 1951

- ▶ Deviance - initial act of deviance is followed by the process of a “deviant” identity
- ▶ Deviant act is given a negative label by authority figures or society (primary deviance)
- ▶ If the person accepts this label it becomes part of their identity (secondary deviance)
- ▶ Labeling Theory - Self identity and behavior are influenced by the terms and labels used to describe classes of groups of people
 - ▶ Self-fulfilling prophecy

Effects of Stigma

- ▶ Can be a barrier to help-seeking
- ▶ Increased acting-out behaviors
- ▶ Reduced public funding for services
- ▶ May contribute to suicidality
- ▶ Shame

Shame

- ▶ A painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety
 - ▶ Merriam-Webster dictionary
- ▶ Directed towards oneself
- ▶ Can be compounded by aggregation of guilt
- ▶ Does not need to be related to a shameful behavior

Shame

- ▶ Counterproductive
- ▶ Can lead to a quality of life that undermines the motivation needed to heal
- ▶ Compounded feelings of guilt can reinforce drug use in order to blunt or eradicate the negative feelings and attitudes of one's prior use

Stigma and Suicide

- ▶ Shame and self-stigma are lower in regions with fewer suicides as compared with high suicide rate regions
- ▶ Suicide rates are higher when appropriate treatments are lacking

Rusch, et al. "Does the stigma of mental illness contribute to suicide?", British Journal of Psychiatry (2014)

If you always see the negative side of things, eventually that's all there is. Always look for the positive no matter how small.

Nishan Panwar

IAROFOMOTES.COM

Recovery

- ▶ **Recovery** is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.



SAMHSA

Recovery

- ▶ By getting well, a person can detach themselves from the source of public stigma
- ▶ Create a new stereotype
- ▶ Get a new label
- ▶ Find a new identity
- ▶ Change public perception of addiction

Recovery Reinvented

- ▶ Recovery Reinvented is an ongoing series of innovative practices and initiatives to eliminate the shame and stigma of addiction in North Dakota.
- ▶ Goal to find solutions to help people in our state affected by the disease of addiction with proven prevention, treatment and recovery approaches.

Recovery is possible



Take home points

- Addiction is a chronic disease of the brain
- Addiction does not discriminate
- Stereotypes contribute to stigma
- Individuals with substance use disorders internalize public stigma which contributes to their addiction

Take home points

- ▶ Stigma affects willingness to seek treatment
- ▶ Shame may contribute to ongoing substance use
- ▶ Stigma can contribute to suicidal behavior
- ▶ Every one of us can help to change the stereotype of addiction