



Dual diagnosis makes recovery more difficult

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Coping with one type of psychiatric disorder can be challenging in itself. The recovery process can become exponentially more difficult when a person has a dual diagnosis.

Dual diagnosis is defined as an individual who has a psychiatric diagnosis (such as major depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, etc.) as well as a substance abuse disorder.

According to the Mental Health America website, 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness. It also reports that the following psychiatric disorders have an increased risk of developing a substance abuse diagnosis: anti-social disorder, 15.5 percent risk; manic episode, 4.5 percent; schizophrenia, 10.1 percent; panic disorder, 4.3 percent; major depressive episode, 4.1 percent; obsessive compulsive disorder, 3.4 percent; phobias, 2.4 percent.

Often it is hard to determine which disorder came first. Sometimes an individual becomes so uncomfortable with symptoms of depression, anxiety or psychosis he might seek escape by using alcohol and drugs.

Due to an individual's lack of knowledge regarding treatment of symptoms of mental illness, he can continue to use substances to the point that it consumes his life.

Or, someone can begin abusing substances to the point that psychotic symptoms (such as paranoia, auditory and visual hallucinations) can develop that do not subside after substance use has stopped.

The process of sorting through

information to determine which is the primary problem is often complicated by the fact that the patients are sometimes not willing to be forthcoming with information regarding the extent of their use or the extent to which they are having problems with symptoms of mental illness.

Since it is difficult to distinguish which disorder is the primary problem, it can be easy to see that treatment of dually diagnosed patients can be complicated.

At one point, mental health professionals attempted to treat each problem area separately. The problem with this method is that if one problem is being addressed, then the untreated problem can impede the overall recovery process. For example, if a person is truly depressed and is not being treated accordingly, then symptoms of depression can interfere with his ability to refrain from using substances.

Current research shows that the most effective form of treatment for an individual dually diagnosed is to have both problem areas being treated concurrently.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) website states there are several key components that will make a treatment program more effective. They include:

- Treatment should be approached in stages
- Assertive outreach should ensure consumers are constantly being monitored and counseled.

- Motivational interventions are used to help empower individuals toward goal attainment.
- Social support can aid in developing positive relationships that can help with the recovery process.

Further support for the individual can come from attending 12-step meetings.

There is a new 12-step meeting — Dual Recovery Anonymous — that is being offered in the community. This meeting is offered at ECHO Clinic (Fourth and Mulberry streets) at 6:30 p.m. on Mondays and noon on Wednesdays.

The focus is to help individuals learn ways to avoid the risks that lead back to alcohol and drug use.

It will take appropriate effort from the patient as well as having an effective treatment team that includes professionals, support groups, family and friends to help facilitate the recovery process.