

DEPENDENCY AND ADDICTION

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Abstract

This is a position paper from the writer's perspective. It is on the topic of dependency and addiction to medications / drugs, and what is the difference. The question to be answered is, can a person be dependent on medication and not be an addict?

INTRODUCTION

The question to be answered in this paper is, can a person be dependent on medication and not be an addict?

According to the national Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA, 2011), addiction is associated with (A) the use of a medication which leads to tolerance and/or (B) the use of a medication which leads to a psychological dependence.

Tolerance (Sinicola & Peters-Strickland, 2006), occurs when a person must take increasingly more of the same drug or medication to achieve the same effect.

Psychological dependence, according to Nida (2011) occurs when a person believes he or she can not function without the medication, and will take it no matter what the consequences may be.

Dependency, on the other hand, occurs when a person has been prescribed a medication for a specific reason, e.g., insulin to control diabetes, or Klonopin to help with symptoms of anxiety. The body becomes used to, or adapts to the medication. If the person does not have the medication, symptoms return and the person is unable to control them independent of, or without, the medication.

Discussion

Tolerance and withdrawal can occur in dependency and addiction. Discontinuation syndrome, a condition wherein the person who suddenly stops taking the medication feels like they are experiencing withdrawal and does experience some actual symptoms also occurs in addiction. The difference between addiction and dependency seems to be that of individual need or necessity, in other words the behavior of the individual is different. The dependent person takes the medication as prescribed, does not take increasing doses nor do they need to do so. They do not spend time engaging in ways to obtain the medication since all they need to do is maintain regular contact with their prescribing physician and have the continuing presentation of the medical or psychological problems which prompted the prescription of the medication.

The person who begins abusing the drug, then becomes addicted, does need to take increasingly higher amounts of the drug. Therefore, they spend more time engaging in ways to obtain the drug. They become preoccupied with how to get the drug.

There are many people who are dependent on various medications. They have medical or psychological conditions which do respond to medications and which, if left untreated, would become debilitating or even fatal. They go to medical physicians or psychiatrists who know how to treat and alleviate these symptoms with medications. If they continue taking the medications as prescribed, without mixing them with other substances including alcohol, over-the-counter medications or herbaceuticals in the absence of the prescribing physician's knowledge, they have not stepped over lines of abuse or addiction and these medications may enable them to have healthy and productive lives.

Conclusion

There is a fine line between dependency and addiction and sometimes people who are medically dependent on drugs, e.g., Narcotics for pain, can mistakenly be called addicts. While they use these medications to control their pain symptoms and while they report considerable pain if they do not have the medication, they are not necessarily addicted. Addiction is associated with psychological and physiological dependence and-or tolerance.

While the argument could be made that people who are dependent on pharmaceutical drugs could control their symptoms in other ways, (e.g., herbaceuticals, acupuncture), some may not know about these options, others may not be able to afford it, and others may simply choose not to accept alternative care as an acceptable option for them. However, anyone who believes he or she is addicted to any substance is strongly encouraged to consult with a counselor because treatment is available and addiction is harmful.

References

National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA, 2011): www.nida.gov

Sinacola, Richard S., Peters-Strickland, T. (2006): “Basic Psychopharmacology for Counselors and Psychotherapists”, Pearson Education, Inc