

# PAUQUETTE NEWS

The Pauquette Center for Psychological Services Newsletter

Summer 2015

**Addiction** is a word that is tossed around easily. Internet addiction, gambling addiction, shopping addiction, celebrity addiction, and the all-too-common alcohol and drug addiction are just a few used in our society. In order to use such a phrase, it is important to understand what the word "addiction" really means. The root of any addiction is found in habit, and it normally speaks to the destructive side. While each addiction includes a unique set of behaviors such as the act of drinking or using drugs, what they have in common is the ability to stimulate pleasure in the brain. Even still, certain things that are addicting to one person may not be for others. For example, I consider shopping to be a punishment. Yet, I am aware of many people who shop to excess and can't seem to curb their enthusiasm for it. For them, shopping may be an addiction.

Several different pathways from our nervous system may trigger what is known as the pleasure center. This hub of excitability is why both behaviors and chemicals can act separately or together to lead to similar pleasurable feelings. Sexual behavior is an example of the combination, where the chemical component is produced by the brain. The act of sex follows a motor pathway which stimulates certain brain chemicals. The first set of chemicals stimulates a cascade of other chemicals which results in an electrical charge to the pleasure zone.

Anything pleasurable we tend to repeat, and anything punishing, we tend to avoid. This repetition is what reinforces the pathways in the brain. Since the behavior or chemical produces pleasure, the pain of withdrawal or consequences comes much later. To put it simply, use of the chemical or behavior feels good, and the consequence of not having that chemical or engaging in that activity feels bad. While this oversimplifies the process, the area of the brain that contains the pleasure center also can control most of the other parts of the brain.

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**Sometimes the  
smallest step in the  
right direction ends  
up being the biggest  
step of your life.  
Tiptoe if you must,  
but take the step**

*-Unknown*

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We're here to help



**Addiction** (Continued from page 1.)

This process is why addictions get firmly set in place. Since the behavior or chemical produces pleasure, the pain of withdrawal or consequences comes much later. To put it simply, use of the chemical or behavior feels good, and the consequence of not having that chemical or engaging in that activity feels bad. While this oversimplifies the process, the area of the brain that contains the pleasure center also can control most of the other parts of the brain.

The repeated cycle between pleasure and the withdrawal of pleasure sets up a strong desire in that area of the brain, and this strong desire becomes a craving. At this point, the person is addicted.

At the point of addiction, negative consequences from using the chemical or engaging in the behavior start to build. Consequences can affect relationships, work, the legal system, finances, or a person's own emotional or intellectual health. Typically, a person will defend his or her addiction and minimize the consequences. Over time, the sheer volume of consequences tends to overwhelm the addiction, and the addict will seek change.

Change is readily available. What we have learned about treating addiction has improved considerably over the past 40 years. There are new and effective treatments, sometimes including specific drugs to help with withdrawal or craving. Skill-building therapies can allow a person to regain control over those aspects of the brain that lead to the pathway of pleasure. It is not an easy process, but it can be very effective.

Your employee assistance program offers referral services and problem solving services that can help you sort out an addiction and the treatment options available to you. Do not hesitate to call us. We are here to help.

*Written by Thomas Hayes Ph.D*



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