



The Language of Addiction

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Editorial

The language associated with addiction has become antiquated as the field has evolved. Terms like alcoholic and addict have negative connotations that can become self-fulfilling prophecies. The trend in treatment is to take the Rogerian approach of person-centered therapy where clients have more control over their treatment and are active participants instead of passive spectators. Being person-centered means that clients are treated as people and are not defined by their addiction.

Historically, self-help encourages individuals to introduce themselves by name and identify themselves as either addicts or alcoholics. This is a tradition that was adopted by treatment facilities. Individuals can take responsibility for their addiction without the label.

In order to be person-centered, treatment providers should adopt a new ideology. Individuals with other diseases say that they have the disease, not that they are the disease. Addiction can follow suit with more positive language to change the perception that addiction is a character flaw and the further perpetuation of the moral model of addiction. "People with an addiction" places the person first, multifaceted individuals who cannot be defined by one thing.

In contrast, the labels "addicts and alcoholics" conjures negative images that are perpetuated in society. Not only are these terms pessimistic and unconstructive, they propagate the moral model of addiction. Since addiction is a disease that can be treated with evidence-based practices and yield positive results, then the language used associated with addiction should reflect this concept.