Why Do We Accept 50 Years of Failure in Treating Alcoholics and Addicts? Is the Definition of Insanity Doing the Same Thing Over and Over and Expecting Different Results?

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Abstract

The drug and alcohol treatment industry in the United States is failing. The acceptance of dismal results and the continuation thereof of subpar treatment modalities needs to be reviewed and providers need to be held accountable. It is clear from the results of drug and alcohol treatment that doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results is complete insanity. The mere fact of an individual afflicted with a disease receiving the same treatment after repeated failures is a drain on the system and ineffective at best.

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How many times have we seen individuals attend 28 day treatment, get out of treatment, relapse and then we send them back to 28 day treatment. Then, they relapse again and once again, we send them to 28 day treatment again. By way of comparison, if I have a bacterial infection and I am sick, the doctor may give me an antibiotic. If in one week, my symptoms don't improve and I remain sick, will the doctor give me the same antibiotic or prescribe a different one? Isn't this similar to what the current practice in treatment entails.

Why is it that we provide the same treatment, time after time? Why is it OK to accept a success rate of treatment at somewhere between 3%-10%? Would these statistics be acceptable in any other industry? If I failed to provide effective products to a customer 97% of the time, how long would I remain in business? The fact remains that for over 50 years, the statistics have remained dismally the same and all of us wonder why insurance is reluctant to continue shelling out money for ineffective treatment.

What is the answer? In my opinion, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. Personal experience and experience working with those suffering from drug and alcohol dependence has demonstrated that if an individual fails to address core, underlying, issues, treatment will fail 97% of the time. Thus, the answer lies in encouraging individuals to deal with core issues, that is, issues related to why drinking and drugging remains an option. Why do people drink and drug to excess? Primarily, to avoid dealing with some issue(s) or feelings related to those issue(s); Thus, the core problems.

In no way do I downplay the importance of 12 step work in recovery; however, how can an individual develop humility and honesty when they don't have a clue what those terms mean. Therefore, we must address family of origin issues related to how these crucial terms were defined for the individual before; an individual can get the most out of working the steps. Additionally, although I believe that psycho-educational information about recovery is critical to understanding the process, how many times does an individual need to be educated (1, 2, 3, 4, 5…times in treatment?)? Most individual in recovery have an analytical understanding of the 12 steps, the problem is that core underlying issues prevent them from effectively and emotionally changing their lives through the 12 step process.

The bottom line for this addict and alcoholic is that nothing changes if nothing changes. As I began to deal with issues such as sexual abuse, abandonment, trust or lack thereof and the inability to take care of myself emotionally, I became able to understand, at an emotional level, the true value of the 12 steps. Then, and only then, did I have the ability to develop true peace inside, meaningful relationships with others and a life beyond my wildest dreams.