Addiction, Alcohol, and Substance Dependence

Merriam-Webster (2010) defines the word *addiction* as “compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance...characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal.”

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV-TR* (DSM-IV-TR) defines *substance dependence* as the following (American Psychiatric Association, 2000):

[a] maladaptive pattern of substance use, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by three (or more) of the following, occurring at any time in the same 12-month period:

1. Tolerance, as defined by either of the following:
   a. A need for markedly increased amounts of the substance to achieve intoxication or desired effect.
   b. Markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of substance.
2. Withdrawal, as manifested by either of the following:
   a. The characteristic withdrawal syndrome for the substance.
   b. The same (or a closely related) substance is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.
3. The substance is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended.
4. There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control substance use.
5. A great deal of time is spent in activities to obtain the substance, use the substance, or recover from its effects.
6. Important social, occupational or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of substance use.
7. The substance use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the substance.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) explains the difference between alcoholism and alcohol abuse as the following (Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.):

Alcoholism or alcohol dependence is a diagnosable disease
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characterized by several factors, including a strong craving for alcohol, continued use despite harm or personal injury, the inability to limit drinking, physical illness when drinking stops, and the need to increase the amount drunk to feel the effects.

According to the Alcohol Abuse Basics (n.d.) Web site, the differentiation between alcohol abuse and alcoholism is the following:

The main difference between alcohol abuse and alcoholism is that alcohol abuse, though similar to alcoholism, does not include a strong craving for alcohol, tolerance, and physical dependence on alcohol. Additionally, alcohol abuse, unlike alcoholism, does not necessarily include the loss of control.

Is Mr. Moore in the following example suffering from addiction/alcoholism/substance dependence? Assume the following additional facts:

When Mr. Moore started going out with his business partners 7 years ago, he would have about 2–3 drinks. As the years progressed, he began drinking more and more. His wife has talked to him repeatedly about coming home after work and not going out to drink with his partners. She has attempted to intervene, but these efforts have only been met with disappointment. Mr. Moore would consistently promise on different occasions that he would be home on a particular evening, only to not show and stumble in at 2:00 a.m. On the night of his arrest, the result of a breathalyzer administered by the police showed his blood alcohol count (BAC) at a 0.24, which is three times the legal limit of 0.08. This information would meet the first criteria of tolerance. Most individuals do not intend to become addicted to any substance. This is many times not a conscious thought. Arguably, the third criterion is met in that Mr. Moore drank more and more alcohol over a long period of time. Mr. Moore’s repeated promises to not go out with his partners and to come home failed miserably; thus, his attempts to control his drinking were unsuccessful. This meets the fourth criteria above. Mr. Moore has missed many of his children’s recitals, concerts, plays, sporting events, graduations, and so forth because of his continued drinking, thus the fifth criteria is met. Only three of the above criteria need to be met over the course of a 12-month period for one to be considered alcohol dependent. Clearly, Mr. Moore has met these criteria and could be diagnosed under the DSM-IV-TR with alcohol dependence.
References


