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HELPING WITH RELAPSE.

A PRESENTATION BY WELLSPRING REHABILITATION CENTRE AT THE A&D REFERRAL SERVICES 90-MINUTE SEMINAR SERIES HELD ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2018.

Background to Subject. Substance Dependency is an illness not an anti-social habit. Persons living with substance use disorder, an aspect of which is substance dependency, are in a way very similar to persons suffering from malaria or typhoid fever; the “infection” comes from a dysfunctional societal system (family, financial, occupational, etc pressures). However, society at large has become comfortable with the destructive attitude of stigmatizing the substance dependent person as an outcast that can never experience a normal and productive life style ever again. Research evidence and treatment outcomes on the other hand suggest that persons living with dependency can and do recover and live a very productive life style. The term “substance” is used when referring to both alcohol and drugs both of which affect the central nervous system (the brain) and lead to an alteration of the individual’s reaction to situations. The human body has what is called “tolerance level” which, simply put, means the ability to increase the quantity of substance taken over a period of time. Since drugs affect the brain which in turn has an influence over the user’s attitude and behaviour, then it follows that prolonged or wrong use of drugs will most definitely affect the user’s attitude and behaviour.

Drug Misuse can be described simply as using a drug for what it is NOT meant for and NOT according to the prescribed quantity; for example taking more vitamin C tablets than what has been prescribed because the tablet tastes sweet; taking pain killers in greater quantity or more than the number of times prescribed for the day for relief from headaches. This can invariably lead to drug abuse. Drug Abuse arises out of the regular, habitual use of a drug in excess of the prescribed dosage and this usually leads to drug dependency or addiction.

Drug Dependency or Drug Addiction is the state where the user can no longer function without taking the particular drug that has been abused over time and whenever the user attempts to stop using the drug, a very painful withdrawal symptom sets in. When not treated in time, substance dependency can lead to death not to mention the life destructive experiences the user faces prior to death.

Problematic drug users are persons who are “ILL” and are unable to help themselves. They exhibit various and diverse symptoms which are substance specific, just like those suffering from other “regular” illnesses. This particular illness however affects the entire “being” of the patient; body, soul and spirit; the three core components of the human being. In view of this, the treatment interventions applied

must also address these three areas of the patient's personality in order to achieve full recovery and restoration to a normal productive life. This is precisely what the Wellspring Rehabilitation Centre's treatment model is anchored upon.

RELAPSE: NATURE, CAUSES, TYPES & PREVENTION.

NATURE AND CAUSES OF RELAPSE. What is relapse? Relapse is peculiar to recovery from substance dependency in the sense that, whereas the treatment of regular illnesses usually brings about the desired cure and relapse only occurs when the treatment is not properly followed through to completion, with substance dependency this is not the case. Relapse has proved to be a pattern in the recovery process of persons living with substance dependency although there are also cases of those who have never experienced relapse in their recovery process and have become fully integrated into the normal productive life style.

TYPES OF RELAPSE. Relapse occurs when a person undergoing treatment for recovery from substance dependency experiences a lapse or set back in the recovery process and goes back to use just once, or actually slips back into regular and problematic use of the substance(s). Such a slip could take the patient back to using either the exact same type/combination types of substance(s) or to an entirely new type/combination types of substance(s). There are varieties of issues that lead a recovering patient into relapse and these must be identified and then carefully dealt with by helping the recovering patient to learn how to identify, sense the approach of and resist the traps called "triggers". A trigger can be defined as a thing or event or period of time that has been associated by the patient with substance use in the past. Triggers can be external (people, places, things, time periods/events) or internal (anxiety, anger, frustration, sexual arousal, excitement, boredom, fatigue, happiness, etc). Whenever the trigger pops up, it elicits thoughts which lead to craving and the result is substance use. Situations that involve triggers and have been highly associated with substance use are usually referred to as high risk situations while those that have never been associated with substance use are referred to as low risk situations.

PREVENTING RELAPSE. Relapse prevention measures are the support strategies which a recovering patient needs to be equipped with early in the treatment program to help him/her remain sober for life. These strategies include skills and information that must first be understood and then be learnt by the patient and kept at his/her finger tips at all times through constant practice. An initial step is the ability of the recovering patient to identify and fully understand what triggers are before they appear, appreciate how they pop up and what dangers they can inflict on his/her recovery process and then develop a well-rehearsed counter measure to avoid them.

Triggers can arise from a variety of situations; visits to certain places, access to certain foods and drinks, hanging out with certain persons, occurrence of certain events, remembrance of certain things, the list is endless. The recovering patient must be helped and supported to clearly identify those triggers that will make him/her begin to desire to use the substance either just one time or to fully go back to problematic use of the substance. Triggers lead to craving for the substance so a successful relapse prevention strategy must teach the patient to master the ability to "kill" the craving whenever it arises.

A further step in relapse prevention is for the recovering patient to learn to resist triggers that have been identified as dangers to his/her continued sobriety. Having identified what triggers his/her craving, these triggers must then be actively avoided by every means possible. Avoiding certain places, persons, foods/drinks, situations therefore become necessary in order to maintain continued sobriety. Other steps include, planning time to engage in non-drug related behaviour; following a planned schedule of low-risk activities; developing the required skill to cope more effectively with problems and behaviours associated with drug use. Recovering patients must therefore decrease their interaction with high risk situations and engage themselves more with low risk situations in order to remain continuously sober.

The Wellspring experience has also revealed examples of those who have been able to overcome craving through repeatedly reciting Bible verses and through prayer and fasting when experiencing craving. Wellspring uses the Christian faith based model of treatment combined with other globally recognized models of intervention. The centre piece of the Wellspring success which has a relapse rate of less than ten percent (10%) is the in depth teaching of the scriptures to the recovering patients. The Wellspring Recovery Program is actually tagged The Discipleship Training Program and Residents are taken through several doctrines of the Christian faith and the Bible which invariably transforms the mind of the Residents during the 5-month fully residential treatment program. The focus of the Discipleship Program is: “know the person of Jesus Christ, learn to trust in Him more and more and then become progressively transformed into His image daily for the rest of your life.”

In conclusion, it will aid our understanding of this presentation and the Wellspring treatment model if a few Bible references are very briefly discussed to show the role of spirituality in the successes achieved at Wellspring since the project began on Sunday, January 16, 1994 through the teaching of the Holy Bible and doctrines of the Christian faith:

BIBLE REFERENCES ON RELAPSE

Jesus Christ talked about relapse in Matthew 12:43-45 (also in Luke 11:24-26) and explained the spiritual significance of the phenomenon:

Matthew 12:43-45. (KJV)

v43. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

v44. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.

v45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

To understand the correlation between His explanation on relapse and substance dependency, it is pertinent to study two other reports of Jesus' works from the Bible:

- #1. The Healing of the Mad Man of Gadarenes – Mark 5:1-20 (also in Luke 8:26-39).
- #2. The Healing of the Dumb Demoniac – Mathew 9:33 (also in Luke 11:14).

Mark 5:1-20. THE MAD MAN OF GADARENES

- 5:1. And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.**
- 5:2. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,**
- 5:3. Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:**
- 5:4. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.**
- 5:5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.**
- 5:6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,**
- 5:7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.**
- 5:8. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.**
- 5:9. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.**
- 5:10. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.**
- 5:11. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.**
- 5:12. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.**
- 5:13. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.**
- 5:14. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.**
- 5:15. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.**
- 5:16. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.**
- 5:17. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.**
- 5:18. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.**
- 5:19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.**
- 5:20. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.**

Matt.9:32-33. THE DUMB DEMONIAIC

9:32. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

9:34. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

The above scriptures which recorded the healings of persons who were suffering from illnesses caused by evil spirits in a way have very close similarities to the nature of persons living with substance dependency and the fact that all the recorded cases ended with healing and re-integration into productive life styles of the patients prove clearly that victims of substance dependency, regardless of its notoriety for relapse, can actually recover and lead very productive lives.

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