

Centenary professor sheds light on substance use disorders in new book

Ten years ago we might not have even been discussing the idea of substance abuse.

Long considered a societal taboo not to be mentioned in public, the ideas of substance abuse and addiction are continuing to evolve in American culture. We are now more likely to know someone who has been battling a substance problem and are familiar with the idea of treatment and rehabilitation connected to such issues.

However, that does not mean the work is done. Science concerning addiction and substance abuse continues to progress, and the more that is understood, the more there is that needs to be explained to the general public for consideration. Just as mainstream society did not understand clinical depression well in the past—and still needs to understand it better—substance abuse is a topic that is emerging but not yet completely absorbed by the general public.



Dr. Keith Morgen, associate professor of psychology and counseling at Centenary University in Hackettstown, said the “coming out” of substance use problems is probably the most noticeable development in the field in the past few years.

“The biggest trend I can see is that (substance use) is becoming an issue that’s much more likely to be talked about in the open,” Morgen said. “We saw that one of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act was that it required insurance companies to have addiction treatment covered. There was a time period when that was clearly not the case.”

Morgen, who is a licensed professional counselor and approved clinical supervisor, and specializes in the area of substance use disorder and addiction, added that the open discussion of such conditions creates an atmosphere in which people who are suffering are more willing to seek the help they need.

“People with addiction issues can seek help and without seeing it as the horrible taboo it once was,” Morgen explained. “One of the things in the past that held back treatment was that it was this societal taboo. Now people are looking around and seeing that this maybe isn’t something that needs to be discussed behind closed doors.”

Dr. Harriet Gaddy, director of the graduate counseling program and chair of the psychology and counseling department at Centenary, said taboo fell by the wayside as drug use increased and more people saw the problem close up.

“I believe the main reason people are talking about it more is that illicit drug use in America has been increasing. When the public began to see overdoses among friends and family, things changed,” she said. “Drug use has almost quadrupled since 2002 and that’s unprecedented.”

“It became more prevalent in the suburbs because of prescription drug abuse,” Gaddy noted. “There’s starting to be a shift in research regarding implementation of services and that’s good.

There has to be some kind of oversight, and there needs to be a lot of training for police and first responders.”

Among the services used when a person is overdosing on an opiate is Naloxone, a drug that counteracts the effects of the overdose,” Gaddy said. “We need to be sure people are trained in how to use (Naloxone). A lot of these deaths can be prevented.” Morgen, author of *Substance Use Disorders and Addictions*, noted there are different types of addictions.

“A substance use disorder is an addiction to a substance specifically,” he said. “It involves a substance that is ingested into the body, like alcohol or cocaine. There’s another class of addictions that don’t involve ingesting a substance.”

For example, he said, people who are addicted to gambling do not take a substance into their bodies but are just as clinically dependent on the practice.

“That’s called a process addiction,” Morgen added. “For example, gambling is listed as an addiction in the (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association). People use gambling as a coping strategy or a source of a ‘rush’ similar to how others use substances.”

The discussion is hardly over, either. “It hasn’t evolved; it’s evolving,” Morgen said. “The notion of the treatment of addiction being a chronic and not an acute treatment is now becoming somewhat more accepted. People used to go for treatment and come out in 28 days. You didn’t get to this point in 28 days, so it’s not going to be resolved in that period of time.

Hopefully the field will continue to change and adapt more longer-term treatment strategies for this chronic condition.” Care of addictions and substance abuse disorders is ongoing, he added. “People still talk about a patient going through relapse. But, this type of rigid perspective is not present in other disorders. For example, many people don’t just get depressed once, undergo treatment and then move on. They have recurring episodes and it is accepted as part of the depressive condition and not a setback”



In the same way, a person with a substance use disorder might continue to need treatment for a chronic disorder. “We’re talking about an individual dealing with a psychological recovery and also a physiological recovery,” Morgen said.

“At Centenary University, Dr. Morgen teaches the study of substance use disorders as part of the curriculum for our psychology students,” says Gaddy. “Incorporating this aspect of the field within our curriculum portfolio provides our students with a thorough perspective of what they need to learn at the baccalaureate level.”

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- Jeffrey Cohen