Substance and Chemical Abuse in Adolescents

Introduction

Substance abuse refers to drug abuse where the drug users become severely affected due to the effects of the drugs. Some of the substances that are commonly abused include: alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, and inhalants. In adolescents/youths, the individuals may fall back in class, he or she may become antisocial and withdraws from the society and friends etc. Excessive use of these drugs can lead to substance dependence. This refers to the continuous use of drugs regardless of the problems that have occurred due to its consumption (Falk, & Hiller, 2008).

With dependency, the individual becomes more drug tolerant and can withstand high dosage of the drug within the body without experiencing any significant effect. Drug dependency makes the user to take high drug dosages, cause withdrawal symptoms if the individual does not take the drug. The individual also works hard to acquire more of the substance. Chemical dependence on the other hand refers to the need to persistently use the drugs. The user is unable to stop even though it could be causing harm. With chemical dependency, rehabilitative intervention is required.

While alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse is relatively common in the society today, it is noticeably common and increasing in prevalence among adolescents and the young adults. Illegal drug use has been found to begin in adolescence. In a study conducted by ‘monitoring the future’, it was found that 24% of adolescents tried an illicit drug by the time they reached 8th grade, 40% by 10th grade and 51% by 12th grade. The most common drug that these adolescent used was marijuana (Compton, & Colliver, 2005).
Addiction in Young Adults

Addiction in adolescents and young adults is more prevalent and progresses more rapidly than in adults due to several reasons. First, the adolescents begin experimenting with mild drugs such as tobacco and sleeping pills. It is almost impossible for parents/guardians to detect anything unusual in the child during this time. The effects of the drugs are mild and can easily be passed as normal (Falk, & Hiller, 2008). Secondly, at this stage of life, the adolescent is facing numerous emotional, physical and psychological challenges. Tendencies such as withdrawals and erratic mood swings may be considered normal for the adolescents. The difficulty in detection means that the substance and chemical abuse progresses and the adolescents become more addicted and dependant.

Third, some adolescents are also prone to drug and substance abuse than others. Adolescents that have been raised in abusive homes, physically or sexually, as well as those with health conditions such as depression are prone to drugs and substance abuse which may progress more rapidly than in adults due to their prevailing condition. In many instances, it takes the occurrence of an incidence such as injury (intentional or in an effort to access more drug) for substance abuse in the adolescent and young adult to be noted (Compton, & Colliver, 2005).

Diagnosis of Drug and Substance Abuse

As mentioned earlier it is not easy to detect and adolescent that it taking or abusing drugs. This is especially in the early stages of drugs abuse as the effects are mild. It is only when the patient engages in acts such as violence, theft or is involved ion unexplained injuries will the option of substance abuse arise. Health professionals can diagnose substance abuse in several ways (Falk, & Hiller, 2008). Clinical examinations on the user can portray information such as weight loss, fatigue and red eyes. This may vary depending on the extent and frequency of drug use. Other symptoms include: having an intoxicated appearance, social withdrawal where the individual becomes antisocial and prefers to keep to themselves, the adolescents may also become untidy. A toxic test can also be done to actually confirm whether
an individual is taking drugs or not.

Treatment

Drug and substance can be managed in several ways. The first is the use of medication. Medications are not necessarily given to stop drug and substance abuse; they are given so as help the addict manage the side effects. Drugs to manage withdrawal symptoms are given to individual trying to break away from the habit of substance abuse. For individuals trying to overcome tobacco dependence, use of nicotine patch and gum are adopted to reduce the urge of tobacco and prevent a relapse. In patient and out patient rehabilitation program have been established to assist adolescents overcome their substance and drug dependence (Falk, & Hiller, 2008).

Individuals that are highly dependant and addicted to taking drugs are admitted to long term rehabilitative centers. The aim of these centers is to ensure that the adolescent gradually stops the substance abuse habit. If the adolescent has not been taking the drug for a long time, then s/he can be signed to an outpatient rehabilitation centre where s/he can gradually stop the habit (Compton, & Colliver, 2005). Therapies involved in the out patient and in patient rehabilitation centers include; formalized group meetings, integration into age appropriate psychosocial systems and detoxification procedures. This therapies and procedures are dependent on the substance that the individual was taking and the duration. Psychotherapy sessions are also conducted to help determine the root cause of substance and chemical abuse in the adolescent.

Conclusion

Drug and substance abuse among the adolescents and the young adults is a serious condition that needs to be addressed. Parents should be the first to detect any sudden and abnormal change in their children. As much as there could be numerous valid reasons for the change, drug use should not be ignored. If it is determined that the adolescent is abusing drugs then treatment and therapy should commence. Drugs and chemical dependence negatively affects
the adolescents as s/he cannot keep up in class, withdraws from society and leads to adoption of vice behavior such as theft so as to find funds to purchase the drug.

Reference
