

ADDICTION RECOVERY WITH BRAIN REGULATION

By Terri Phillips, MFT

The statistics for addiction issues in this country are staggering. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2009) 22 million Americans have a substance abuse or dependency problem with only 2.5 million of them entering a hospital or clinic for treatment. Consequently, this epidemic results in the Federal Government's projected spending for fighting drug abuse at \$12 billion. Prescription painkillers continue to be on the rise and now rank #2 in the United States on the list of drugs most abused. I'm sure we all agree that drug and alcohol abuse are huge problems. Most of us know someone close to us or a family member who suffers from addiction. Many who are reading this article may struggle themselves.

Experts would agree that addiction is a complex illness with the potential for serious consequences. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) defines as follows: "Addiction is a brain disease that affects multiple brain circuits, encoding those involved in reward and motivation, learning and memory, and inhibitory control over behavior". The intense cravings involved in addiction are driven directly by the brain.

What do we do about addiction? There is no single treatment for everyone. Addiction treatment is as complex as the problem itself. Most who report successful recovery have utilized a "team" approach to help them on their journey. 12 step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) can be extremely helpful in the process. Treatment programs that are outpatient or inpatient often will enlist the family members to help set up success for the addict. Addiction usually involves mental health issues. Addicts often begin their path by medicating mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, bipolar illness and Attention Deficit Disorder. They may also begin this path with prescribed medications for Chronic Pain issues.

As part of the treatment plan to address the addicted brain, Neurofeedback has yielded some promising results. There are some prominent addiction rehabilitation centers throughout the country that have added a Neurofeedback component to treatment. In the 2009 Five Year Strategic Plan of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) it was reported that "non invasive brain stimulation and 'neurofeedback' may prove to be novel therapeutic tools...these techniques show promising results in managing depression and influencing pain perception".

Neurofeedback is a way to regulate brain patterns to teach the addicted brain itself to operate in a calm, alert, focused manner. It is non-invasive and involves placing sensors on the scalp while a trained Neurofeedback clinician supervises the computer system while your brain plays a video game on the monitor. The brain then conditions itself to relax helping to regulate its functioning. As the brain learns to calm down by

itself, the need for the drugs and alcohol diminishes. Of course this should be included with supportive counseling to develop new coping strategies, 12 step programs, family therapy and any other effective forms of treatment.

Remember, there is help available for addicts. You are not alone in your struggle. The first step is making a call to start to get the help you or your family member needs. Recovery is possible and you can start today!

Terri Phillips is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in Neurofeedback located in Temecula. Call 909-730-0410 or visit www.terriphillipsmft.com for more information.