Curbing Depressive Tendencies One ‘Happy Hour’ at a Time:

Responsible social drinking at Rutgers University

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Summary

Treating depression can sometimes be the most arduous task in a person’s life. This illness is debilitating to a person and can lead to drastic and dangerous forms of treatment. Many who are depressed will turn to alcohol to treat their ailing depressive thoughts and feelings. Alcohol is a drug classified as a depressant, which means it has a depressing effect on the central nervous system and may cause slowed pulse, poor concentration, confusion, fatigue, impaired coordination, memory, judgement, respiratory depression and death. Our service project will be coordinated with the “Happy Hour” program which takes place on the Cook Campus, at Rutgers University. “Happy Hour” is an informative session where students can discuss matters which interest them, specifically the effects of alcohol on depression. This paper will outline the general facts on depression, as well as give a clear understanding on alcohol abuse. At the end, one should have a clearer understanding as to why depression should never be treated with alcohol.

Video Link
The Issue: Depression and Alcohol Abuse

What is Depression? (JMB)
The symptoms of clinical depression are more than “feeling down” or having temporary feelings of sadness; mainly because most of us have experienced these feelings in our everyday lives. Depression is a serious condition which can affect a person’s body and mind in various aspects of life. Clinical depression can have effects on all parts of everyday life including eating, sleeping, working, relationships, and how a person thinks about himself/herself.

Those with depression cannot simply wish it away, or wake up from it; depression is a medical condition which must be treated. If they do not receive appropriate treatment their symptoms can continue for weeks, months, or years. However, there are many forms of treatment including various forms of medication, which can be prescribed by a mental health professional or physician.

Depressive illness comes in different forms. The three major forms are described below. Each can vary from person to person in terms of symptoms experienced and the severity of depression.

- In **major depression**, people experience a sad mood or loss of interest or pleasure in activities for at least 2 weeks. In addition, they have at least four other symptoms of depression. Major depression can be mild, moderate, or severe. If it is not treated, it can last for 6 months or more.

- In **dysthymia**, a milder, but more chronic form of depression, people experience a depressed mood for at least 2 years (1 year for children) accompanied by at least two other symptoms of depression.

- In **bipolar disorder**, also called manic depression, a person has periods of depressive symptoms that alternate with periods of mania. Symptoms of mania include an abnormally high level of excitement and energy, racing thoughts, and behavior that is impulsive and inappropriate.

What Makes Someone Clinically Depressed? (JMB)
People that become clinically depressed are sometimes overwhelmed with their lives, expressing fear and emotion in daily tasks. Another major symptom is losing interest in activities you enjoyed as a pastime. Many who are depressed can lose all of their normal emotions entirely.

Clear markers of depression can be sudden weight gain or loss, as well as changes in sleeping pattern; insomnia or an exorbitant amount of sleep. Restlessness, slowed movements, and mental or physical fatigue may also indicate depression.

Other feelings that can arise include guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, fear, and decreased self esteem. Those with clinical depression have difficulty concentrating and thinking in a clear and presentable manner; some will experience memory issues. In addition, individuals suffering from depression often think about self-harm in the form of either self-mutilation or suicide.

When a child experiences depression the symptoms may include recurring nightmares, trouble eating, and learning or disciplinary issues in school. Children may also become withdrawn or
exhibit social aggression. In adults it is not uncommon for people who are depressed to abuse alcohol, drugs and to engage in excessive behavior, perhaps developing an eating disorder or a sexual addiction.

It is not known exactly what causes depression. As with many mental illnesses, depression can evolve from a variety of factors ranging from the biological to genetic and appear in a variety of ways. Here are a list of the common ways depression can start:

- Biological differences. People with depression appear to have physical changes in their brains. The significance of these changes is still uncertain but may eventually help pinpoint causes.
- Neurotransmitters. These naturally occurring brain chemicals linked to mood are thought to play a direct role in depression.
- Hormones. Changes in the body's balance of hormones may be involved in causing or triggering depression. Hormone changes can result from thyroid problems, menopause and a number of other conditions.
- Inherited traits. Depression is more common in people whose biological family members also have the condition. Researchers are trying to find genes that may be involved in causing depression.
- Life events. Events such as the death or loss of a loved one, financial problems and high stress can trigger depression in some people.
- Early childhood trauma. Traumatic events during childhood, such as abuse or loss of a parent, may cause permanent changes in the brain that make you more susceptible to depression.

(list provided by the Mayo Clinic Website on Depression)

What is Alcohol Abuse? (TB)
Alcohol abuse differs from alcoholism in that it does not include an extremely strong craving for alcohol, loss of control over drinking, or physical dependence. In fact, because drinking is a popular activity among many Americans it is sometimes hard to tell whether your drinking is becoming problematic. Although alcohol abuse is basically different from alcoholism, many effects of alcohol abuse are also experienced by alcoholics.

Many people wonder why some individuals can use alcohol without problems but others cannot. An important reason for this has to do with a person’s genetics and family traits. Many scientists say that having an alcoholic in your family makes it much more likely that a person will develop abusive tendencies towards alcohol. Genes, however, are not the whole story. In many cases one’s personal environment and those he or she surrounds themselves with can help influence a problem. If one separates themselves from society they are likely to experience feelings of loneliness, therefore one’s emotional health is a factor of alcohol abuse. In addition, alcohol abuse can arise from where somebody lives or how they interact with friends and family in situation involving alcohol.

Symptoms and Signs of Alcohol Abuse (TB)
Warning signs of abusers of alcohol to others are:
● Seeing that a person does not fulfilling major responsibilities at work, school, or home due to being hung over or ditching these responsibilities in order to have a drink.
● Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as while driving a car or operating machinery.
● Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol.
● Having relationship problems due to drinking.
● Drinking to relax and relieve stress after a long day or after an argument.

In addition, most abusers will continue to drink excessively despite having problems in their professional and personal lives.

Signs that you may have a drinking problem
● If feel guilty or ashamed when or after you drink.
● If you lie to others or hide your drinking habits.
● You have other people that are close to you who are worried about you and your drinking habit.
● If you need a drink in order to feel relaxed.
● If you forget what happened while you were drinking.
● If you regularly drink more than you were planning to.

Effects of Alcohol Abuse: (TB)
There are tremendous health risks associated with alcohol abuse; some which damage the heart, liver, and brain. In addition, alcohol may effect your personal relationships, your emotional health, and because it may effect your career, in toll, it may carry on to having a negative financial situation.

Alcohol damages the body. it can cause Alcohol-induced liver disease which was the ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death in the nation in 2004. The liver cells die and the body tries to defend itself by inflaming the liver, which eventually leads to organ failure and without a transplant these diseases are fatal.

Drinking raises the levels of fat in the blood, in excessive amounts this will lead to high cholesterol and cardiovascular disease. Because of the high cholesterol people who excessively drink have a higher risk of having a stroke. Other problems related to heart disease and use of alcohol are cardiomyopathy, cardiac arrhythmia, and death.

Alcohol damages brain cells, therefore, alcohol damages the cells in the brain that are still developing, as a result, decision-making skills are impacted.

Not only does alcohol abuse effect your physical body but it effects your relationships with others. Alcohol causes problems within the family such as violence, marital conflict, infidelity, jealousy, economic insecurity, divorce, and fetal alcohol effect. Because one may be unable to perform the duties a job requires while continuously drinking alcohol it may cause one to be unable to own and pay off living expenses and, in the worst case scenarios, live in poverty. There are horrible expenses people have to pay due to being an alcohol abuser yourself or knowing someone close to you who has an alcohol problem.
Treatment for Depression: (JB)
In order to receive the appropriate treatment for depression, one should have a physician conduct a routine examination to determine the best form of treatment. Various biological discrepancies and certain medications can cause the onset of depression. The physician is used primarily to rule these symptoms out and to guide a person in the right direction. If a physical cause for the depression is ruled out, a psychological evaluation should be done, by the physician or by referral to a psychiatrist or psychologist.

An accurate diagnostic evaluation will include a complete history of a person’s symptoms. For example, when they started, how long they have lasted, how severe they are, whether the patient had them before and, if so, whether the symptoms were treated and what treatment was given. A doctor will most likely ask if a person in taking drugs or abuses alcohol, and if the patient has thoughts about death or suicide. A family history should be taken which includes questions about family members who might have depression, and what treatments they received which helped.

Treatment choice will depend on the outcome of the evaluation. There are a variety of antidepressant medications and psychotherapies that can be used to treat depressive disorders. Some people with milder forms may do well with psychotherapy alone. People with moderate to severe depression most often benefit from antidepressants. Most do best with combined treatment: medication to gain relatively quick symptom relief and psychotherapy to learn more effective ways to deal with life's problems, including depression. Depending on the patient’s diagnosis and severity of symptoms, the therapist may prescribe medication or psychotherapy that have proven effective for depression.

Exploring Depression Treatments: (JB)
- **Learn as much as you can about your depression.** It is vital to determine if your depression are due to a medical pre-disposition for clinical depression. Conditions should be treated first, and monitored above all else. The more severe the depression the greater the treatment must be.
- **It takes time to find the right treatment.** Treatment will require a trial and error of sorts to determine the right dosage of medication or therapy. One with depression must be open to the many changes ahead as well experiment with various medications.
- **Do not rely on medications alone.** Although medication can relieve the symptoms of depression, studies show that other treatments, including exercise and therapy, can be just as effective or even more so.
- **Get social support.** The more you grow your social connections, the more protected you are from depression. If you are feeling stuck, do not hesitate to talk to trusted family members or friends. Asking for help is not a weakness but a sign of strength.
- **Treatment takes time and commitment.** Depression treatment takes time and can feel overwhelming at times. These feelings are normal, but recovery will come.

Alcohol Abuse Treatment: (JMB)
The initial goal in any alcohol abuse treatment is pure abstinence; no dependence on alcohol whatsoever. People who suffer with alcohol abuse who are in good health, have a strong support system, and the motivation to get better are much more likely to recover. Statistics show that
approximately 50% to 60% remain sober and abstinent at the end of a year long treatment process; a majority of those stay dry permanently. Those with poor social support, poor motivation, or psychiatric disorders tend to relapse within a few years of treatment. In the case of these people, success is usually measured by how long they have stayed sober until they started drinking again.

For a serious alcohol problem, you may need a stay at a residential treatment facility. Many residential treatment programs include individual and group therapy, participation in alcoholism support groups, educational lectures, family involvement, activity therapy, and working with counselors and professional staff experienced in treating alcoholism.

A person can only begin the treatment for alcohol abuse when they admit to having a problem. Also, the person should commit to stop drinking. He or she must understand that alcoholism is curable and must be motivated to change. Treatment has three stages:

1. Detoxification (detox): This may be needed immediately after discontinuing alcohol use and can be a medical emergency as detox can result in the withdrawal seizures and hallucinations
2. Rehabilitation: This involves counseling and medications to give the recovering alcoholic the skills needed for maintaining sobriety. This step in treatment can be done inpatient or outpatient, both are equally effective.
3. Maintenance of Sobriety: This step's success requires an alcoholic to be self-driven. The key to maintenance is support, which often includes regular Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and getting a sponsor.

A person who is coping with alcohol abuse requires a change in lifestyle. People in his or her life should understand how difficult dealing with alcoholism can be and help in the process of recovery. A person should definitely consider their social situation. Make it clear to your friends and family that you are not drinking. You may need to distance yourself from friends and social situations that impair your recovery. It is important to develop healthy habits when in recovery. For example, good sleep, regular exercise and eating well all can make it easier for you to recover from alcoholism. Lastly, do things that don’t involve the use of alcohol. A person may find that many of your activities involve drinking. One should replace these tempting situations with hobbies or pastimes that are not centered around alcohol.

Alcohol and Depression: A Destructive Relationship

There is a direct correlation between depression and alcoholism with up to fifty percent of alcoholics exhibiting symptoms of major depression during a given period of time.

This paper recognizes that alcohol and depression do not mix well and can have dire consequences. Alcohol is a depressant and can increase the risk of existing depressive symptoms from redeveloping. In addition, many people who abuse alcohol will likely use alcoholic drinks to self medicate for their depressive thoughts and symptoms.

When depression and alcoholism exist together, it is known as co-morbidity, meaning two diseases that exist in the same person. Depression and alcohol abuse interact in a complex manner, it is sometimes hard to differentiate between the two when they are working together. Alcoholism and depression interact with each other in what can often be in a complex way. The
two illnesses, when working in unison, cannot be treated separately; only when the relationship between the two is understood can a successful treatment be realized.

Hereditity plays an important role in the onset of alcoholism and depression. If one has a family history of these disorders, it makes it much more likely to develop either one of these disorders over time. In addition, both conditions can work on one another, exacerbating each condition to its fullest capacity. Frequent and heavy drinkers are vulnerable to becoming depressed. One reason is that alcohol abuse debilitates overall health and emotional well-being, work and relationships; creating more tension between the two. The fact is that alcohol is actually a depressant; it is quite easy to see why an alcoholic can become depressed.

Individuals who suffer from stress, anxiety, or depression may use alcohol as a way to relax and escape from their problems. However, to compensate for the amount of time they have been drinking over the effects on their depression, they may need to drink larger quantities to get better results. This can lead to alcohol abuse or dependence.

People with depression and alcoholism have a heightened risk of suicide, vehicular accidents, as well as other harmful and risk-taking activities. Together, the illnesses can advance an existing depressive state, impair judgment and increase impulsiveness. Alcohol and depression can be a deadly combination.

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The Service Project: “Happy Hour” (TMB)

On the first Friday of every month Rutgers University holds a Happy Hour event coordinated by the Dean, Rick Ludescher. It is easy for students to binge drink at college parties or on their own due to the stresses of college life, therefore Happy Hour offers a place where students can drink responsibly.

Alcohol is a depressant, it lowers the serotonin and norepinephrine levels in your brain. These are the chemicals that give you feelings of well being, and help you feel normal. Students drink alcohol for many different reasons; in general alcohol initially makes one feel good; it temporarily numbs the effects of stress hormones, however after drinking you feel even worse than before you started because alcohol depresses your nervous system and your brain. Individuals who binge drink wipe out these feel good chemicals from their body.

Some students drink as a way of coping with the stresses of every day life, it is easy to excessively drink alcohol when there is no social support. On the other hand, a social setting may be what causes a student to binge drink. For example, at a college party one may be literally pressured to drink, not kept count of how many drinks they had, be playing too many drinking games, or feel like they have to drink because of the setting; whatever the reason there
is not much stopping someone from over drinking. Happy Hour is a controlled environment where students are able to have one drink per hour. There is free food, free non-alcoholic beverages, music, give aways, and lots of socializing. Students are able to meet the deans and see what the campus has to offer. At Happy Hour a student is able to socialize in a healthy way while having a drink or two, this leaves one in control of their mood and able to enjoy the great atmosphere Happy Hour creates.

Joan Jones is the head coordinator of Happy Hour, she makes sure everything is running smoothly and the students are enjoying themselves. We worked with her and the staff, they put in lots of effort to make sure everyone is accommodated. We helped the staff, on the first of April, to prepare for the event and enjoyed ourselves during the event while serving the students. At Happy Hour the students were so social that you had to raise your voice in order for the person next to you to hear what you are saying. The event was such a success, it created a great social setting to get to know new people or hang out with old friends while having a drink or two.

Joan Bankole-Jones: Special events coordinator (732) 932-8990
http://howistoppeddrinking.org/how-alcohol-causes-depression
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Editorials

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Alcohol may make the stresses of college worse

Two things that come to mind when you mention college is the challenging workload and the partying. The unexpected course work students experience may be overwhelming and can cause you tremendous amounts of stress leading to feelings of sadness and anger. When college students go out to parties they drink a lot in order to distress from a rough week of classes. If drinking alcohol is your way of escaping you may have problems of both depression and alcohol abuse.

When you start college you try to prepare yourself as best you can after hearing how much work you are expected to do in order to receive that A. So to prepare for exams you study as much as time permits, however because of the numerous exams you have you could only study so much. You feel like you did the best you can but you still receive the average grade of the class and this causes you to feel much frustration and sadness. If you constantly have these feelings that interfere with your ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy activates then you have symptoms of depression. Turning to alcohol as a self-medication in order to take away these feelings of
depression can cause more harm than you think. As we have learned in our high school health class alcohol is a depressant, therefore it obviously worsens the symptoms of depression.

Scientifically, alcohol lowers the serotonin and norepinephrine levels in your brain. These are the chemicals that give you feelings of well being and help you to feel normal. Initially you may feel that alcohol makes you feel good, this is because it temporarily numbs the effects of the stress hormones, however after drinking you feel even worse than before you started because alcohol depresses your nervous system and your brain. Eventually binge drinking too often will destroy these chemicals of well being in your body.

It is harder to treat someone that is suffering from depression and alcohol abuse because they feel dependent on alcohol to make them feel better, some do not realize alcohol may be in fact, the key ingredient that is making these feelings of depression linger.

The rate of depression among college students is growing due to many factors such as the workload, stressful relationships, and experiencing loneliness due to being away from home. There are lots of places that offer help on college campuses to students feeling depressed. There are a few here on the campus of Rutgers University; one for example, is “Happy Hour,” which is held on the first Friday of every month. “Happy Hour” promotes responsible drinking and creates a setting where students are able to socialize in a healthy way while having a drink or two. Being in a social setting, especially while drinking, is important to people going through rough times. Being around people and creating healthy relationships protects you from the negative thoughts that you experience when you are alone. There are many other ways to relieve stress other than drinking, make the right choices to reduce the stress of your college life.

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To whom it may concern,

The subject of alcohol abuse and depression are two very important and distinct diseases. I am writing you to inform the public of the very grave and difficult state of living with any depression, let alone a substance abuse problem. Essentially, a person who is depressed may self-medicate, using alcohol as a depressant to curb their feelings of sadness and lack of self worth. It is important to remember that there are legal medications which are accessible and useful in treating chronic and acute depression. This opinion piece should stress, above all else, that the combination of alcohol with onset depressive thoughts or vice versa, is never a good solution.
Alcohol depression is quite rampant these days as up to 40 percent of people who drink alcohol heavily have symptoms that resemble depression. However, when these same people are not drinking heavily, only 5 percent of men and 10 percent of women have symptoms meeting the need to be diagnosed for depression.

Even though when used sparingly, alcohol may briefly produce a pleasant and relaxed state of the mind, depression resulting from alcohol is not uncommon. This starts off like anything else, slowly but picking up intensity with time. When alcohol is used sparingly, it may for a while lift the moods; however, when used to treat a depressive illness, tolerance to the effects of it may lead a patient of depression to drink more alcohol in search for a positive effect. This is where the problems begin, one drinks more and more and before you know it, alcohol has become a distinctive depressant; causing depressive tendencies in the mind.

The first step to overcome an addiction is admitting that you have a problem. When overcoming a drinking problem as well as a mental illness, it is highly recommended to find a support system if not a physician to consult with. Although this article only skims the top of the issue, it is vital information because anyone is susceptible to these ailments. The final message to relay to readers on this topic should be if you are depressed you should not take up drinking alcohol in an abusive way. There are medications as well as talk therapies which are a much safer solution to depression. Adding alcohol abuse to an already difficult condition should absolutely be out of the question.

If you have any questions regarding depression symptoms or alcohol abuse solutions, please contact your local health authority or consult a medical consult. Leaving your depression in the hands of alcohol can lead to a much harsher condition.

Sincerely,

Joshua M. Bickel