Alcoholism people

Health & Medicine, Alcoholism

Chronic and often progressive illness involving the excessive inappropriate ingestion of ethyl alcohol, whether in the form of familiar alcoholic beverages or as a constituent of other substances. Alcoholism is thought to arise from a combination of a wide range of physiological, psychological, social, and genetic factors. It is characterized by an emotional and often physical dependence on alcohol, and it frequently leads to brain damage or early death. (Nicholas, 2001) Some 10 percent of the adult drinkers in the U. K. are considered alcoholics or at least they experience drinking problems to some degree.

More males than females are affected, but drinking among the young and among women is increasing. Consumption of alcohol is apparently on the rise in the U. K. , countries of the former Soviet Union, and many European nations. This is paralleled by growing evidence of increasing numbers of alcohol-related problems in other nations, including the Third World. (Richard, 2006) Effects Alcohol has direct toxic as well as sedative effects on the body, andfailureto take care of nutritional and other physical needs during prolonged periods of excessive drinking may further complicate matters. Advanced cases often require hospitalization.

The effects on major organ systems are cumulative and include a wide range of digestive-system disorders such as ulcers, inflammation of the pancreas, and cirrhosis of the liver. The central and peripheral nervous systems can be permanently damaged. Blackouts, hallucinations, and extreme tremor may occur. The latter symptoms are involved in the most serious alcohol withdrawal syndrome, Delirium Tremens, which can prove fatal if not treated or treated improperly. (Donald, 2000) This is in contrast to withdrawal from

narcotic drugs such as heroin, which, although distressful, rarely results in death.

Recent evidence has shown that heavy--and even moderate--drinking during pregnancy can cause serious damage to the unborn child: physical or mental retardation or both; a severe expression of this damage is known as fetal alcohol syndrome. (Richard, 2006) Genetic and Behaviour factors Alcoholism is considered a disease which runs in families and results from genetics. According to Edenburg, " Alcoholism is a disease of the mind and body similar to other diseases like cancer". Alcoholism is like cancer because both are based on the genes of the person, Edenburg feels.

Edenberg is Chancellor's professor at the Indiana University School of Medicines and was the lead researcher for the study. Edenburg believes that even though there is not one single " gene that causes alcoholism", the statistical link between genes and the risk for alcoholism is powerful. He has researched the GABRA2 gene, which is one of many genes that produce parts of the receptor for the brain's primary inhibitory neurotransmitter, GABA (Edenburg, 2004). Edenburg believes that the link between alcoholism and this gene is the strongest.

His evidence came from the study he conducted that involved 2282 individuals from 262 families, all picked because each had 3 or more alcoholicfamilymembers. The Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA) has been working on the study for years. COGA is a federally funded effort whose objective is to identify and characterize those genetic factors. Over 1, 000 alcoholic subjects and their families are in the study, with researchers conducting comprehensive psychological,

physiological, electrophysiological, and genetic analyses. Several traits, or phenotypes, have been identified by the study that seem to be linked to genetics.

Although environmental aspects are very important, these studies give solid evidence that genes play a major role. Adoption studies have also supported the role of inheritable factors concerning alcoholism (Fitzgerald, 1988). Researchers studied males and females that were adopted, comparing them with non-adopted siblings. Both males and females of alcoholic and non-alcoholic parents were also studied. A child with alcoholic parents is four times as likely to become alcoholic than one with non-alcoholic parents, even if the child was adopted and raised in non-alcoholic families.

(Ann & Gary, 2004) If adopted children with alcoholic parents whom lived with non-alcoholic foster parents are still four times more likely to become alcoholics, it proves that genes are more to blame. Furthermore being raised by a biological alcoholic parent did not increase the likelihood of developing alcoholism (Fitzgerald, 1988). Robert Karp, PhD, is the program director for genetics at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. He says that the end stage of alcoholism looks fairly similar, but there are many different ways to get there, so there are probably many different genetic causes (Elliot, 2001).

Although some data points to a genetic basis for alcoholism, other studies go in the other direction. A study published inScienceNews that tested 356 pairs of twins showed minimal correlation with alcoholism and genetic factors. The report supports the opinion of many scientists that think environmental factors play a larger role in alcoholism than genes (Bower, 1992). The study

was among women of all ages and among men with drinking problems that surfaced inchildhood.

The researchers tested 85 pairs of male identical twins and 44 pairs of female identical twins (sharing the same genes), and 96 pairs of male fraternal twins and 43 pairs of female fraternal twins (sharing half of their genes), along with 88 pairs of opposite-sex fraternal twins. (Donald, 2000) To choose the sets of twins, the researchers would find on twin who had undergone treatment for alcohol dependence or abuse, then sought out the other twin. The study suggests that family influences have a greater effect on these people than their genes do, reports psychologist Matt McGue of the University of Minnesota and his colleagues.

McGue feels that environmental factors are more to blame for the development of alcoholism with this study as evidence. McGue's team also reports that genes play a larger role in alcoholism for the men whose problem emerged during childhood. According to McGue, " Although the data emphasize environmental influences on alcoholism, they also indicate that consistent delinquent and cruel behavior derives from important genetic effects. "((Nicholas, 2001) Some experts consider alcoholism to not only derive from genetic causes, but also environmental causes.

According to Donald, family studies have repeatedly confirmed that the risk of alcoholism is higher among parents, siblings, and children with relatives that are alcoholics. While genetics may play an important role, there are other factors that can influence individual biological susceptibility to the effects of alcoholism (Donald, 2000). The fact that alcohol abuse is linked to behavioral and environmental factors leads to the point that genetics act

together along with other non-genetic factors (Mawr, 2002). Alcohol abuse is very likely to involve multiple genes that control various aspects of the biological response to alcohol.

Environmental factors amplify the chance of alcoholism when mixed with these genes(Heath and Nelson, 2002). Some experts agree that both genetics and environmental factors play equal roles in alcoholism. According to Howard J. Edenberg, alcoholism is a " complex disease", which means that many genes as well as environmental factors play a role. It is known that addiction runs in families, but how is it transmitted? Are we born with an 'addiction gene' or with an 'addictivepersonality', or are we taught addictive behavior by our family and society? This classic question of nature vs. nurture is answered with a qualified " both.

" (Heath and Nelson, 2002) Psychoanalytic theories make some intuitive sense since many alcoholics have immature social skills. They often turn to alcohol to help cope with life stresses. Despite this intuitive appeal, there are little prospective data to support these theories. An alcohol dependent person may exhibit dependent traits, however, these traits are just as likely to result from chronic alcohol use as they are to lead to it. (Ann & Gary, 2004) Even if correlations exist between alcohol abuse and dependent personalities, it is not clear which is the cause and which is the effect.

Treatment Treatment of the illness increasingly recognizes alcoholism itself as the primary problem needing attention, rather than regarding it as always secondary to another, underlying problem. Treatment is administered in specialized residential treatment facilities, separate units within general or psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics, and physicians' offices. (Richard,

2006) As the public becomes more aware of the nature of alcoholism, the social stigma attached to it decreases, alcoholics and their families tend to conceal it less, and diagnosis is not delayed as long.

Earlier and better treatment has led to encouragingly high recovery rates. (Donald, 2000) In addition to managing physical complications and withdrawal states, treatment involves individual counseling and group therapy techniques aimed at complete and comfortable abstinence from alcohol and other mood-changing drugs of addiction. Such abstinence, according to the best current evidence, is the desired goal, despite some highly controversial suggestions that a safe return to social drinking is possible.

Addiction to other drugs, particularly tranquilizers and sedatives, poses a major hazard to alcoholics. Antabuse, a drug that produces a violent intolerance for alcohol as long as the substance remains in the body, is sometimes used after withdrawal. (Doug, 2005) Alcoholics Anonymous, a support group commonly used for those undergoing other treatment, in many cases helps alcoholics to recover without recourse to formal treatment or facilitates sustained remission in those who completed formal treatment.

Two pharmacotherapies, naltrexone and acamprosote, have recently been shown to reduce the chances for relapse to alcohol dependence when used in combination with psychosocial treatment. Conclusion After reading through many articles about how Alcoholism is a disease, I found that the evidence proving it false was a lot greater than evidence proving it was in fact a disease. The research and facts provided revolved around a physical change in ones system, or " tolerance".

With any substance that is introduced to the body, it becomes familiar with it and can withstand more of a dose that normal. This does not mean that one is becoming " dependant" on it or will have trouble not using the substance. It simply means that his body is adjusted to the levels that he his inducing. The process is similar to that of exercising. If one has never jogged before, he will find it hard to go the distances that a regular runner can, without losing breath or pausing.

With repetition and constant practice though, he will find that he is able to travel longer distances without tiring out. Independent studies abroad have shown that one of the major reasons disproving " Alcoholism as a Disease" is that when treated with a program such as AA, the drinker, or " patient", is confronted with stopping drinking cold and taking control of their lives. If Alcoholism was in fact an uncontrollable disease, that takes control of various organs and functions of the body as it deteriorates them, one would not be able to do this process successfully.

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