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Dual diagnosis describes people living with mental illness and a substance abuse issue. In many cases, the underlying mental condition encourages addictive behaviors. By recognizing and treating the psychological issues, therapy programs can identify how the two conditions interact and help the individual embark on the path to recovery.

Research supports that roughly one-third of people suffering from a mental disorder and nearly half of people suffering from a severe mental disorder (such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) experience drug or alcohol abuse. Roughly half of all drug abusers and one-third of all alcohol abusers are dual diagnosed with a mental disorder. Among all people who suffer from a mental disorder; men, military veterans and those with other medical ailments are, on average, more likely to abuse substances including alcohol, cocaine and painkillers.
The Link Between Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

Mental disorders and substance abuse interact differently from person to person. Below are some common themes in the study and implementation of dual diagnosis:

- **Substance abuse may serve as a means of self medication.** People with mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), learning disorders, depression and anxiety disorders often achieve relief through the use of drugs or alcohol. However, this high is only temporary and fails to address the root issues. In fact, once the high wears off, the individual will likely seek more of the substance, leading to a vicious cycle of two fueling forces.

- **Substance abuse can exacerbate the mental disorder.** For example, acute intoxication can cause severe chemical imbalances in the brain that may induce harmful thoughts and actions, including suicide. People suffering from PTSD can experience heightened bouts of panic alongside other withdrawal symptoms.
Drug or alcohol abusers without a mental disorder may start to develop symptoms of one. Frequent hallucinations following substance abuse can trigger early stages of psychosis. The risk of developing a dual diagnosis with substance abuse as the root varies from person to person.

People with a dual diagnosis are more likely to get involved in violent or self-destructive behaviors that can result in depression, suicidal thoughts and legal issues. The greater the stress these individuals experience, the more dependent they become on their choice substance. In the worst case scenario, the individuals cannot function physically or mentally without the substance, leading to severe withdrawal symptoms.
Characteristics of an Effective Dual Diagnosis Treatment Plan

The core components of an effective dual diagnosis treatment program include:

- **A comprehensive, long-term, staged approach to recovery**
- **Seminars that teach patients powerful life skills and build connections with fellow patients and staff**
- **Motivational interventions designed to provide support and understanding, not confrontation**
- **Assertive outreach programs backed by the patient’s loved ones**
- **Parallel management of mental illness and substance abuse**
- **Seminars that teach patients powerful life skills and build connections with fellow patients and staff**
Dual Diagnosis Treatment Options

Due to the complexity of dual diagnoses, holistic treatment is preferred. Holistic treatment programs focus on the individual as a whole rather than as a sum of disorders and afflictions. Holistic health care professionals see a person as mind, body, soul, and environment. All aspects are interconnected and must be reconciled together to alleviate illness and return the person to his or her natural, fully functioning state.

Experienced holistic treatment centers incorporate it with traditional medical practices such as cognitive behavioral therapy, and adaptive treatments such as art therapy. Empowerment is key: the individual must gain the knowledge and tools required to direct their own health and future.
Understanding, loving, and supportive family and friends play a major role. Holistic guidelines include:

**Empowering** people to live with freedom and control over themselves.

**Understanding** a person as a human being and not another case of addiction or psychosis.

**Focusing** on the underlying issues rather than the surface symptoms.

**Collaboration** between the patient and the health care professional to reach treatment goals.
Before holistic treatment can be implemented, individuals displaying intense or life-threatening symptoms require immediate medical attention. Such situations include:

**Severe drug overdose** or alcohol intoxication that may induce nervous system shutdowns or heart failure.

**Inhalation of cocaine**, methamphetamines and other drugs that may trigger stroke and arrhythmia.

**Use of downing drugs** such as painkillers and sleeping pills that can result in permanent sedation and ultimately death.
All too often, withdrawal symptoms can have similar or worse effects on the body that require immediate medical attention. These severe symptoms usually surface when a drug or alcohol abuser quits “cold turkey” while the body has adapted to dependency. Such situations include:

**Dual Diagnosis Treatment Options**

- **Withdrawal from downing drugs resulting in acute tremors, seizures and body shutdown**
- **Alcohol withdrawal resulting in seizures, acute delirium, stroke, and arrythmia**
Dual Diagnosis Treatment Options

Holistic treatment brings together family, friends, healthcare providers, fellow patients, and the individual to create a powerful network of healing. Treatments often begin with detoxification at an inpatient treatment center followed by medications designed to mitigate life-threatening withdrawal symptoms.

Effective dual diagnosis programs tailor mental illness and substance abuse treatments on an individual basis. Unconventional yet effective therapies (which may be used together) include art therapy, yoga, nautical therapy and group outings.
Choosing the Right Treatment Plan

Many dual diagnosis patients have trouble either acknowledging the need to seek help or obtaining the help they need. They may require immediate detoxification at a hospital, clinic or dual diagnosis treatment center. They may need to be away from family members and in a new environment surrounded by people going through similar issues.

The best treatment depends on the individual’s medical history, personality traits and other underlying factors. Research suggests that psychiatric or behavioral therapies have a greater effect on patients detoxified from the harmful substance. In the absence of painful or mentally debilitating symptoms, patients can focus on addressing traumas, anxiety and bottled up emotions at the core.
Choosing the Right Treatment Plan

Individuals also have different options available depending on the stage of their recovery. Patients who recently graduated from a treatment program can continue their education and recovery at an inpatient rehabilitation facility or specialized home. Others may find it soothing and reaffirming to return home to loved ones who can provide a familiar, positive network of care and encouragement.

Many treatment centers provide patients with contact information for staff and other residents to create a sense of security following program completion. Due to the fact that many people struggle with relapse and coping with mental illness triggers in the long term, this openness can do wonders to help patients live happily and healthily for years to come.
Dual Diagnosis Statistics

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has compiled the following statistics on dual diagnosis:

- Employed Men: 13%
- Employed Women: 14%

Roughly 40% of employed adults in the United States who were assessed with a dual diagnosis received treatment for any condition.

Less than 5% underwent therapy or treatment for both conditions.
Percentage of patients undergoing substance abuse rehab who were dual diagnosed

- Percentage of women enrolled in dual diagnosis treatment
- Over HALF of people who received a dual diagnosis failed to receive treatment or therapy to aid in recovery.
Dual Diagnosis Statistics

- 2.4% were dual diagnosed

- 10% of the full time workforce in the United States has experienced a drug or alcohol abuse problem or mental health issue at some point in their lives.

- Among dual diagnosis patients, 45% struggle with alcohol addiction.

- 21% of the population is addicted to prescription opiates.
The Importance of Seeking Professional Care

A dual diagnosis is often too much for a person and their family members to handle alone. Enrolling in a professional treatment center greatly improves an individual’s prognosis and teaches invaluable life skills necessary to stay substance-free and cope with mental illness triggers.

The Gardens at Lake Worth provides tailored and holistic care to maximize patients’ chances of recovery. Located in the heart of southern Florida, The Gardens At Lake Worth is made up of dedicated professionals with decades of knowledge and experience in providing holistic treatment for substance abuse and mental illness.
References

http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Dual-Diagnosis
For adults battling drug and alcohol addiction, The Gardens at Lake Worth provides the highest quality of personalized treatment in boutique, luxuriously appointed residences. Our 30 day program combines physical, mental and spiritual healing and rehabilitation. Our small size ensures that our Masters level therapists have the time to truly connect with their clients, build a customized treatment plan and adjust it based on whether or not a client is seeing success. The Gardens at Lake Worth is luxury-level drug and alcohol rehabilitation offered at South Florida’s most competitive rates.

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