

Chapter 19

Hidden Faces of Substance Use Disorders

SUDs and the homeless

- Addiction and the homeless
 - 45% to 78% of those who are homeless have a substance use disorder
- Substance use problems and the elderly
 - Alcohol use disorder (AUDs) are the third most common psychiatric problem found in older persons
 - Problems of AUDs/SUDs in older age groups is of increasing concern, a trend that is expected to continue
 - The role of the individual's substance use in the loss of one's home is complex, and there is not always a causal relationship

SUDs and the elderly

- The elderly make up approximately 12% of the population of the US
 - They used a third of all prescription medications and one-half of all over-the-counter medications
- Approximately 2% to 4% of the elderly are thought to have a substance use disorder (SUD) involving alcohol, drugs, or both
- Older persons with an AUD are overrepresented among those seeking health care because alcohol abuse exacerbates or causes many medical disorders for which older persons seek medical treatment

Hidden Faces

- Alcohol use disorders have been identified in 25% to 30% of men and 5% to 12% of women hospitalized for medical treatment of conditions other than the AUDs
- Detection of substance use disorders in elderly is so difficult
 - More concurrent medical problems
 - AUD/SUD often mimics symptoms of other disorders commonly found in the elderly making differential diagnosis difficult
 - Older drinkers attribute physical complications to the aging process rather than to their alcohol use

Hidden Faces

- Because older individuals are more vulnerable to the negative effects of alcohol or drugs of abuse, they tend to experience negative consequences of their chemical abuse at levels that do not raise suspicion in family members or outsiders
- 3 beers or mixed drinks consumed by a 60-year-old may have the same effect on the drinker as 12 beers or mixed drinks consumed by someone who is 21

Hidden Faces

- Consequences of AUDs/SUDs in the elderly
 - Subject to all of the dangers associated with the abuse of alcohol or drugs but compounded by age-related bodily changes
 - Accidental falls, bone fractures, depression, memory problems, liver disease, cardiovascular disorders, and sleep problems
 - Extracts a terrible toll on peace of mind
 - 25% to 50% of all elderly suicide victims have used alcohol prior to their suicide attempts
 - Easily resulted in misdiagnosis and mistreatment

Hidden Faces

- Compared to non-drinkers, early onset AUDs are usually from lower economic levels, have less education, smoke more, socialized with individuals who abused alcohol more often
- Individuals with late onset AUDs generally come from higher socioeconomic levels, enjoy higher income level, and have stronger familial/social support systems on which to call
 - They tend to report more negative life events such retirement, illness or death of a spouse, geographic relocation, loss of lifelong friends, deteriorating health, and depression

Hidden Faces

- 10% of the elderly misuse prescription medications. Drug misuse takes several forms:
 - Intentional overuse of a medication
 - Underuse of a medication
 - Erratic use of a prescribed medication
 - The failure of the physician to obtain a complete drug history

SUDs in the GLBT communities

- Statement of the problem
 - The sexual minority groups tend to abuse chemicals more often than the general public
- Substance play a central role in the social lives of gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals

Substance abuse and the disabled

- Very limited body of literature
- Up to 62% of individuals who are disabled have an alcohol use disorder (AUD)
- Treatments for this group are quite limited
- Substance abuse and ethnic minorities
 - Native Americans
 - Alcohol use is thought to be quite widespread
 - Alcohol-related death rate for Native Americans is 440% higher than for the general population

Ethnic minorities and SUDs

- Hispanics
 - Drinking, especially heavy drinking, tend to be a male activity
- Asian Americans
 - Women are likely to abstain
- African-Americans
 - Started heavy drinking later in life relative to European males
- Native Americans-the alcohol related death rate for Native Americans is estimated to be 440 % higher than it is for the general population in the U.S.