

New therapy available to help drinkers overcome their addiction to alcohol

Fairbanks, AK, May 2, 2005--Remarkably, there are four problem drinkers for every “hard core” alcoholic, but these individuals do not fit the conventional alcoholic profile and are often reluctant to seek treatment. A new integrative program provides them with an effective, appropriate therapeutic solution. It is based upon clinical studies and combines medication, hypnotherapy, and vitamin supplementation. It also allows patients a choice of complete alcohol cessation or moderate, controlled drinking.

None of Lucy Johnson’s* co-workers and few of her friends suspected her drinking was out of control. Ironically, she served as an executive for a respected nonprofit organization in her community, providing resources to other agencies whose clients battled their own problems with addiction.

But each evening’s 20-minute commute included a familiar stop at the liquor store to purchase a prepared vodka martini cocktail, delivered in a small, pop-open aluminum can, loyal in its assurance of discretion and convenience. It served as the daily primer, with a buzz timed perfectly for her arrival home. It was the precursor to an evening of drinking that lasted well into the night. Cocktail hour started earlier on weekends.

“I begged God to help me stop” she says. “For 20 years, I prayed. On Sunday in church I prayed the hardest—I wanted this to end more than anything. But on the way home from the service, I would find my car sneaking into the right lane, and there I would be...at that liquor store again. This problem was so much bigger than me.”

Lucy’s situation is not unique. A highly functional problem drinker, able to go about her business during the day, involved in a solid, long-term relationship, and hiding her problem from those around her, she represents what some consider a “neglected majority” of drinkers in the United States. Incredibly, there are an estimated four problem drinkers for every hard core alcoholic. Yet these individuals do not fit the alcoholic profile and are often reluctant to seek treatment through conventional means.

Dr. Linda Garcia, MD, an internist who specializes in early recognition and treatment of alcoholics, agrees the problem is epidemic. “We in the medical community have simply not provided these patients, whether they are early problem drinkers or late stage alcoholics, with the tools they need to overcome their addiction,” she says. “Instead, we make them feel shameful, stigmatized, or we offer therapies that simply don’t work.”

Garcia had previously prescribed both conventional and emerging medical treatments to her patients but was unimpressed with the results. “We’ve tried Antabuse, an aversion drug, as well as the newer medicines like Naltrexone, which has offered short-term benefit. I’ve also recommended fellowship-based counseling such as Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a wonderful program and has helped many people, but it is not a good fit for everyone. In-patient treatment may not be appropriate for this particular population, either. I’ve also come to realize that many problem drinkers do not necessarily wish to abstain completely from drinking—that the most desirable outcome for some of them is to be able to control and to moderate their consumption.”

Then, about two years ago, Garcia learned about a multi-faceted approach that incorporated a medication called Topamax™, which had been reported in the medical journal *Lancet*, to reduce craving among drinkers. But fundamental to the new program was the integration of two other critical elements: customized behavior modification delivered on hypnotherapy CDs and a nutritional component, which includes vitamins, minerals, and amino acid supplementation. Diet and exercise are also addressed. In addition, the program allows patients to undergo treatment in the privacy of their own homes and costs significantly less than some of the alternatives.

“This therapy made absolute sense to me when I first read about it,” says Garcia, whose practice focuses on integrative medicine and who has a keen eye to alternative and nutritional therapeutics. Once she learned more about it and the patients who had experienced success, she adopted the program into her own practice and eventually became the official medical spokesperson. She also wrote the forward to a book, *My Way Out* by Roberta Jewell, an ex-problem drinker who describes her story and the program she helped develop. Garcia’s excerpt is available at www.mywayout.org.

Lucy happened to learn about the new therapy from a newspaper article on New Year’s Eve a day after her husband, searching for something in her car, instead found the five empty vodka tonic cans she’d tucked under the seat and forgotten to dispose of.

“He had lined them all up on the hood of the car—one for every day of the week,” she said. I walked into the garage and it stopped me cold. He didn’t have to say a word. But I knew right then that I had to get some help.”

Lucy started the program soon afterwards and reported her transformation was dramatic and took place within days. She says that for the first time she was able to gain control over her drinking. “It’s as if I was finally able to turn off a switch in my brain that simply wasn’t there before. It’s incredible.”

Like many in Garcia’s practice, Lucy opts to drink in moderation.

“For someone like Lucy, moderation works,” says Garcia. “However for others, clearly, abstinence is a much more appropriate goal. This is one of the reasons we strongly encourage patients to work closely with a qualified health care provider so they can help an individual assess his or her need and direct that person toward a safe and responsible recovery program.”

Garcia says she receives physician and patient inquiries from all over the world and is training others in the program to keep up with ever-growing demand.

“Our patients are enjoying remarkable success and we want to extend that success to others as quickly and as broadly as possible,” says Garcia. “This is a terribly pervasive problem but now we finally have an effective therapy that offers hope.”

** Name changed to protect her identity*

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