



AMERICA'S ADDICTION CRISIS: REGAINING SOBRIETY THROUGH SPIRITUALITY AND SUPPORT

As opioid use in the United States skyrockets, death and destruction from alcohol and drug abuse continues unabated, weaving tentacles through the fabric of everyday life, affecting the lives of not only the addicted, but also those who through no choice of their own must stand by helplessly and watch as the people they care about spiral downward.

We are all affected in some way by this epidemic.

Yearsoflookingtheotherwayandofmisunderstanding the disease has created a monster that lurks inside a drink of alcohol or a syringe or a pill bottle, just waiting to pounce.

Addiction might begin innocently enough; perhaps by one seeking relief from physical pain, or maybe yearning for a short respite from some past or present anguish that is real or imagined, or simply looking

for a good time at a party. The cycle of addiction, the high, the low, the remorse...is like being mired in quicksand. The loss of self-worth and self-esteem is only the beginning. For some comes the loss of jobs, families and loved ones...even death.

What if I told you that for some it's impossible to say no?

For some, the brain has been reprogrammed in such a way that feeding the craving is as real and as necessary as breathing.

The first drink for some is a choice, but not for the addict. It's not something they can just "get over."

I have seen countless lives and families destroyed by this scourge. I've watched it rob people of health, love and life. The risk is real for every person from every walk of life. This disease does not discriminate. Unable to control the impulse and the cravings, the

brain has been rewired to expect to be fed, to be nourished, by the very thing that is destroying it.

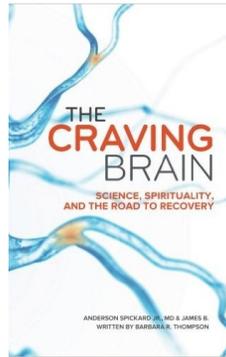
Science has revealed the powerful connection between the brain and addiction, and we are closer to understanding that there may someday be a cure. Much like cancer is a disease of the flesh, addiction is a disease of the brain – an addict’s brain is physically altered to deceive the addict into believing they must have a fix to survive. This instinct to survive is the most basic and powerful known to man.

As we learn more about addiction and discover the changes that occur in the anatomy of the addict’s brain, we are closer than ever to realizing the true impact that habitual substance abuse has on the systems in the brain. The moral thought process of an addict is virtually hijacked and rewired to crave the fuel that is killing the addict.

We now realize that someone can be predisposed to mimic earlier generations in a family. This knowledge offers hope to the millions of people who are especially vulnerable to this disease.

We learn at an early age to stay away from fire so as not to be burned. In this same way, children must be taught at an early age the devastating effect drug and alcohol

abuse has on the brain, especially if there is a family history of the disease.

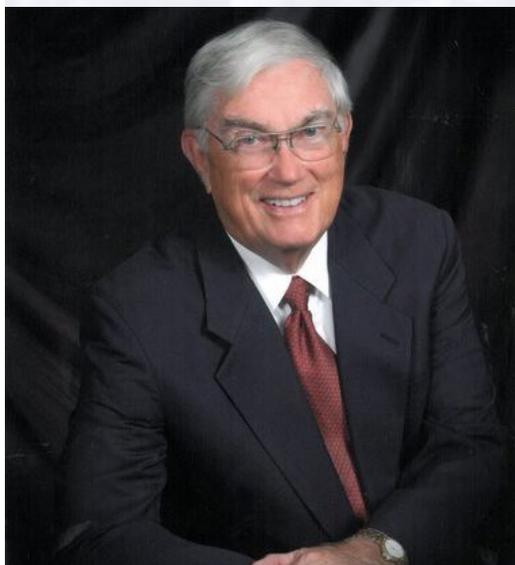


The Twelve Step Program in Alcoholics Anonymous is so often successful because it allows an addict to push the reset button. The process guides the addict toward the realization that through owning their vulnerability and accepting their reality there is a first step toward self-worth. Nurturing spirituality is paramount to an addict’s success, and the effect it has in filling the emptiness that was once filled by the abuse of drugs and alcohol is key.

Spirituality is the warrior that steps in to fill a void that no amount of drugs or alcohol can fill. A strong support system, methodically working through the Twelve Step Program or the equivalent, accepting a personal relationship with one’s own spirituality is a process, sometimes painful and difficult to work through...and not to be rushed...but possible.

The good news is that it is possible to regain control of the hijacked brain and to rewire the circuitry to embrace sobriety and the life affirming opportunities it offers. These programs offer hope to thousands of people who have reached the point of desperation and are ready to regain control of their lives.

I am filled with hope that the discovery of the connection between addiction and brain science will aid our understanding of this dread disease, and enable us to more fully guide the addict toward a recovery that will sustain them for life.



Dr. Anderson Spickard, Jr. is an emeritus professor of medicine and psychiatry at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He is a nationally recognized expert in the areas of substance abuse and addiction having served as a certified addictionologist, founding director of the Vanderbilt Institute for Treatment of Addiction, founder of the Center for Professional Health at Vanderbilt, national program director of the Robert Wood Johnson “Fighting Back” program and leader in the Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse. His books include “Dying for a Drink: What You and Your Family Should Know About Alcoholism,” “Stay With Me” and “The Craving Brain: Science, Spirituality and the Road to Recovery.”