

Local Therapist brings real compassion to substance abusers while taking a multi-directional approach to treatment.

With the opioid epidemic that has crept into communities across the nation, there is one local professional who has been helping people overcome their addictions.

Bernard Ball, LMSW, counselor, helps patients from his Warren office who are dealing with drug addiction, alcoholism, and also depression and anxiety. Ball said substance abuse has become so commonplace that everyone knows someone struggling with addiction or knows someone who knows someone with a drug or alcohol problem.

"It's more than just the addict," he said. "Families and friends are affected by it as well."

He noted in the late 1990s people began to more readily abuse prescription pain medication and thus became addicted to the many opiate-based pain medications. It's not a coincidence considering painkiller prescriptions tripled from 1991 to 2011.

Through behavioral therapy, Ball can help those who are suffering. People generally become addicted because of the physical response they receive when drinking alcohol or using drugs.

"There's a blueprint that can form in the

brain. With repeated use some will develop a craving," Ball said.

According to Ball, the pleasure center of the brain is the part that feels only the pleasurable effects of a substance. Another part of the brain experiences the negative effects such as the hangover, withdrawals, and not feeling well after the pleasure effect wears off.

For an addict, Ball said, the pleasure center of the brain is constantly trying to rationalize using again for the pleasurable effect. The overwhelming urge to experience only the pleasure effect while disregarding the aftermath can sometimes prevail. Withdrawals can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, and other symptoms. This is coupled with the psychological punishment of knowing another dosage will make that feeling of misery go away, albeit only temporarily.

Part of addiction treatment is keeping that overwhelming urge in check by being aware of the caution signs when it may come out. That includes who do you call, where did you go for a safety zone and how do you overpower that urge.

"It involves changing," Ball said, adding

the person needs to find another way to deal with problems and difficulties in life rather than drugs and alcohol that involves paying a lot of money to feel awful. Calling an emergency contact to do a reality check can be effective. Ball also encourages his patients not to put themselves in situations where they would be most tempted to use drugs or alcohol. Identifying these situations as well as triggers so that an effective plan for dealing with them is essential. Unfortunately, many addicts don't want to be talked out of using drugs.

"They have to be ready. The road to recovery is different to everyone," Ball said. "It's a day at a time. I've heard the first 90 days are the hardest because you're making a major change." Ball also works with people dealing with depression and anxiety who can be susceptible to resorting to drugs and alcohol to deal with their emotional pain.

"I try to look at all kinds of underlying

causes. I try to help identify triggers. I have an interest in adult survivors of child abuse or people who were bullied who may be self-medicating," he said. "They have self-esteem issues. They have a lot of issues with how they take criticism or how they react to someone or something. Their conditioning leads them into self-defeating behaviors which can make them more susceptible to picking up"

While the physiological mechanisms for addiction are similar, the etiology (root causes) varies. Until these forerunners are dealt with, reversing

and maintaining the non-addiction is problematic because the underlying cause remains intact.

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