

Recovery Oriented Systems of Care: How Research is Changing the Addiction Profession

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Research is a vital component for many growing professions. It helps those in the field better understand and comprehend how far their occupation has come, as well as what can still be learned from it. Research can be seen as a very positive aspect for many, as it helps our knowledge about a certain topic grow. The information that can be obtained through running studies can lead to discoveries that could exponentially benefit society as a whole. My outlook on research, especially when it comes to being in the addiction profession, is nothing but positive. Many would say knowledge is power, and we cannot acquire the proper knowledge or understanding with research being done.

Literature Review

One of the hardest aspects about the addiction field is that it is so often misunderstood because it has so much to do with the brain. The brain is a component of the body that is forever growing and changing. It is so complex and intricate that new research can be done on it quite often, and new discoveries will form. A large portion of research being done for addiction is on the brain, specifically how the brain changes with certain drugs and what parts of the brain are effected over time with the use of substances. According to the National Institute of Health (2013), stimulating specific parts of the brain helps in reducing obsessive cocaine seeking behaviors. From their findings, researchers believe there is a potential approach to changing behaviors an addict might exhibit. The study was further conducted on the brain of rats, in which they shocked the animals every time they wanted cocaine. They focused on the pyramidal prelimbic cortex neurons, as these are often involved in drug seeking behaviors. As predicted,

activating these brain cells reduced cocaine seeking in the compulsive, shock-resistant rats. Inhibiting the cells in shock-sensitive rats increased cocaine seeking during foot-shock sessions (NIH, 2013). The research done in the study is so significant for the addiction field because we are able to find new techniques for treatment. By acquiring this knowledge of the brain we are able to apply this when using therapy, and we know that pursuing this area of the brain can produce results. Studies done on the brain are sometimes complicated and hard to comprehend, but the importance of them for better understanding the mind of an addict are essential to the addiction profession.

Research is also changing the addiction profession by helping break the stigma that is so often associated with substance abuse. For some time, there has been a negative connotation because those who do not know much about addiction often think it is an affliction that the addict chooses. Though there are some cases where that may have been the case, a large portion of addiction can also be genetic. This again shows that research has been so beneficial in proving the genetic component that is associated with addicts. Research has been so important in the area of genes because it has helped us see what genes are passed down that result in making a person more susceptible to addiction. When researchers discover a gene that plays a role in addiction in a model organism, such as mouse or fruit fly, they can then identify the counterpart gene in humans by looking for similar DNA sequences (University of Utah Health Sciences, 2014). By conducting this research we are helping not only our profession but those who do not know much about the addiction field. For research to be able to find similar genes in animals as in humans corresponding to addiction really helps us understand how strong the genetic component is for humans. Every one person is different, which is why not all treatment plans work, but by addiction professionals seeing the role genetic differences have, we are then better able to give

our clients the medication and therapy they need for their genetic makeup. In the future, genetic tests could be used to determine which medications are likely to be most effective based on an individual's genetic profile (University of Utah Health Sciences, 2014).

One of the best things about research is the fact that it shows evidence of what is being studied and it can help prove certain beliefs or disbeliefs. Some people think that the addiction profession is not necessary, and because of that often we get overlooked for funding. A lot of times what happens is that the funding allotted is meshed with mental health for co-occurring disorders, but our funds are not used for strictly the addiction aspect of the client's treatment. Research has been so beneficial for the profession in proving that it is shown that what we do helps those with addictions and that treatment addressing it is necessary. Without the research that has been done we would not know about all the different factors that can make someone addicted. For example we did not only learn that addiction can come from your genetic make-up but other factors like your environment, education, and interpersonal relationships can also play a role in if you become an addict as well. Research is also important though in showing how we as professional is the field need and can make improvements to what we are doing. It is not a secret that people often relapse when in recovery, in fact 40- 60% of recovering addicts relapse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016). Some may say we are failing as professional or what we do is not helpful, but relapse is a terrible and unfortunate reality of addiction. Counselors cannot always control what someone does once out of treatment. That is where research comes in, helping to show which forms of treatment are the longest lasting and beneficial for clients. It can also show us which prevention and treatment techniques are not beneficial, which is okay because it can help us make improvements and become even better addiction specialists.

Research is an essential component to the addiction profession; we are a forever changing and improving field that needs the most up to date information possible. One of the best and only ways to do so is through conducting research and testing the information you find. The change that research has brought to addiction profession is important, and in the end it's necessary for us to continue as a helping occupation.

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