



Touchette Regional Hospital Brings Awareness To Alcohol Use Disorder During Alcohol Awareness Month

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CENTREVILLE - The month of April is Alcohol Awareness Month and is the perfect time to emphasize the need for education on Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). Drinking too much alcohol can have a direct impact not only on an individual's health and safety, but that of their families and communities as well.

According to the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 14.5 million people ages 12 and older had AUD. This number includes 9.0 million men and 5.5 million women.

“Our concern is that these numbers could increase for people during the pandemic. We must ensure individuals have the appropriate tools, support, and strategies needed to cope with stress and avoid alcohol misuse,” says Michelle Petrosky, MHA, BSN, RN, Executive Director of Behavioral Health at Touchette Regional Hospital.

In the COVID-19 era, individuals are facing unprecedented stressors. Uncertainty about the future, lost income and social isolation can lead to uncomfortable conditions, such as loneliness, anxiety and depression. Alcohol misuse often accompanies and worsens, these conditions. Research conducted early during the COVID pandemic has linked increased drinking to cope with stress, and researchers are concerned that a potential spike in alcohol use disorder could be a consequence.

Alcohol use disorder is a medical condition characterized by an impaired ability to stop or control alcohol use despite adverse social, occupational, or health consequences. It encompasses the conditions that some people refer to as alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, alcohol addiction, and the colloquial term, alcoholism. AUD can be mild, moderate, or severe and can cause changes in the brain making individuals vulnerable to relapse. The good news is that no matter how severe the problem may seem, evidence-based treatment with behavioral therapies, mutual-support groups, and/or medications can help people with AUD achieve and maintain recovery.

What Increases the Risk for AUD?

“A person’s risk for developing AUD depends, in part, on how much, how often, and how quickly they consume alcohol,” Petrosky explained. “Drinking excessively, which includes binge drinking and heavy alcohol use, over time increases the risk of AUD.”

Other factors can also increase the risk of AUD, such as: drinking at an early age, genetics and family history of alcohol problems, and mental health conditions and a history of trauma.

What Are the Types of Treatment for AUD?

“Several evidence-based treatment approaches are available for AUD,” Petrosky noted. “One size does not fit all and a treatment approach that may work for one person may not work for another. Treatment can be outpatient and/or inpatient and be provided by specialty programs, therapists, and doctors.”

1. Medications. Three medications are currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to help people stop or reduce their drinking and prevent relapse:
2. naltrexone (oral and long-acting injectable)

3. acamprosate
4. disulfiram

All these medications are non-addictive, and they may be used alone or combined with behavioral treatments or mutual-support groups.

2. **Behavioral Treatments.** Behavioral treatments, also known as alcohol counseling or “talk therapy,” provided by licensed therapists are aimed at changing drinking behavior. Examples of behavioral treatments are brief interventions and reinforcement approaches, treatments that build motivation and teach skills for coping and preventing relapse, and mindfulness-based therapies.
3. **Mutual-Support Groups.** Mutual-support groups provide peer support for stopping or reducing drinking. Group meetings are available in most communities, at low or no cost, at convenient times and locations—including an increasing presence online. Combined with medications and behavioral treatment provided by health professionals, mutual-support groups can offer a valuable added layer of support.

Recovery programs based on mutual peer support, and many different behavioral therapies, involve social support and are very helpful for people struggling with maintaining sobriety or regulating their alcohol consumption.

If you are concerned about your alcohol use and would like to explore whether you might have AUD or to learn more about alcohol treatment options, click the link to either our [adult substance abuse program](#) for outpatient care services or our [medical stabilization program](#) for inpatient services for more information.