
Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre

2008 - 2011

Anthony Sobb



OAKDENE HOUSE
FOUNDATION

Foreword:

In recent years I have been fortunate enough to have travelled to Las Vegas for work related matters. During these trips and through networking, I met Dr. Rob Hunter, the Co-Founder Psychologist and Head of the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre. Through time, Rob and I's friendship developed to a point where during my annual trip to Las Vegas, I would attend Rob's clinician sessions at the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre. I started keeping a diary of notes that I had made during each of these visits and in turn formatted them into documented-style papers. The papers act as a formalised recollection of what I learnt and observed during these sessions. I trust through reading these, one may become a little more insightful and knowledgeable in regards to the disease of addiction, and in particular that of gambling.

Anthony Sobb

Chairman of Oakdene House Foundation

"First seek to understand, then seek to be understood."

- Anonymous

Contents

Page 4 2008

Page 11 2009

Page 15 2010

Page 19 2011

2008

LAS VEGAS PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE



The Clinician sessions at the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre are of paramount importance in ensuring our organisation is completely abreast of all the latest and most successful methodology utilized when treating problem gamblers. They also act as an important conduit in maintaining this synergy between the leading problem gambling centre in the world and ourselves.

This session was headed by Dr. Rob Hunter, co-founder of the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre and considered by many as the world's leading clinician on problem gambling. The rest of the attendees, apart from myself, were all compulsive gambling addicts whom I shall only call by their first name for obvious privacy reasons.

This session began with Dr. Hunter explaining the difference between the GA meetings and clinician sessions. He explained that GA meetings are usually a closed session (i.e. attended by addicts only and run by addicts). During these meetings addicts will follow the guidelines of the 12 Step Program (see page 15). Whereas clinician sessions are headed by a clinician with specific discussion points based on the individual addicts. It may include discussion on the human body's brain and how this wiring may affect the addict or it may be some self help homework. This usually takes the form of self audits on their behaviour, personality, feelings and/or habits.

In this clinical session the attendees were:-

Joanne is a 45 yr old female who embezzled \$600,000. She is currently awaiting trial within the next two (2) weeks with four (4) counts of felon and one (1) count of fraud with the possibility of a 12 year sentence in the State Penitentiary. Joanne maxed out all her cards then proceeded to embezzle from her employer. Joanne still finds it hard to believe this actual figure of \$600,000. She sometimes finds herself still sifting through the evidence, but believes it's just another form of denial. A week after being discovered by her employer Joanne attempted suicide by cutting her wrists. She currently drives three (3) hours each day just to attend these sessions with Dr. Hunter. Joanne explained that she is frightened to go to jail and fully expects that she will be sentenced to the State Penitentiary. At this point in time Joanne explains that she has some peace of mind because she is actually dealing with the issue.

Rita is a mid 30's Asian lady from Laos who is currently employed as a dealer at the Tropicana Casino located in Las Vegas. Rita explained that gambling was a form of escape from her unhappy marriage. Rita is fairly new to the program and also suffers from alcoholism.

Janet is a young Strip Dancer from a men's bar located in Las Vegas. Janet was involved in drugs, sex and alcohol from the age of 14. After overcoming alcoholism through AA, Janet then turned to gambling (this is often referred to by Dr. Hunter as "changing deck chairs on the Titanic"). Janet spoke of losing everything, maxing out all her credit cards, borrowing from all her friends, basically losing everything she owned. Janet recalled that she gambled to escape herself as she hated the person she had become. Janet spoke of recently, since she had been involved in the program, small things are now taking on significance; things that she used to take for granted like the smell of coffee, the smell of flowers and watching somebody smile. These now brought her great joy. Janet explained that despite the fact that she was now financially poor, she had now found great solace since she had surrendered to this compulsive disorder.

Janet spoke of the games she used to play with herself to try and control her gambling addiction such as locking her wallet in the glove box of the car. This was her idea of keeping things safe or she would only take a fixed amount of money with her into the casino and no credit card, but end up making a dozen trips back to the car, thus using all the cash and maxing out the credit card.

Mary is currently in recovery (as there is no cure) and has abstained from gambling for eight (8) years. Mary is 49 year old grandmother. She also had what Dr. Hunter calls the quartet. Addictions to sex, drugs, alcohol and gambling. Mary explained that she has an incredible work ethic which was solely based on her need to earn money which thence enabled her to gamble. Mary has not only lost all her finance and assets, but lost her marriage and family through her gambling. At one point Mary was living in a tent in Lake Tahoe under the delusion that living in a tent saved her money.

Linda is approximately 60 years of age and at one time was considered a high society, beauty queen of Las Vegas. Linda had addictions to drugs, alcohol and gambling. Linda has currently been 12 years in recovery from alcohol, drugs and gambling. Linda is now the Senior Councilor and Spiritual/Emotional Advisor at the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre. Linda spoke of how she had maxed out all her savings and credit cards and borrowed from



her friends. Linda even cashed in her three children's college education funds in one sitting. Linda recalls 12 years ago how she had to wait a week before a vacancy arose for her to attend these sessions at the Centre. Linda spoke of how she had to sleep each night outside in her garden on a deck chair because she said that when she slept inside in her bedroom she could hear the calling of the gun to commit suicide, hence the only way she could escape the gun was to sleep outside. Linda spoke on how emotionally free

Each day Linda rises in the morning she is thankful and if she were to die tomorrow she would die a content and happy person by the fact that she has devoted her life now to helping others with this illness.

Mike is a young male in his mid 20's. Mike arrived late and looked physically and mentally exhausted and upset. He was very agitated. Upon sitting down to the meeting Mike burst into tears and shouted "I can't take any more I haven't slept for three days". Mike currently held three (3) full time jobs in an attempt to repay the debts he had incurred through his addiction. He was currently in complete financial, emotional and physical ruin. Mike explained he couldn't live like this anymore and felt that had he not come to this session he would have killed himself. At this point in time Rob called for a break to the session and exited with Mike for a private session - 20 minutes later we resumed.

Dr. Hunter spoke of the many games addicts can play with themselves; kidding themselves they are controlling their gambling addiction. He spoke of a builder who welded a titanium box at the back of his ute requesting his boss to only pay him in cash and placed the money not with him but into the titanium box for safe keeping. One (1) hour after the employee placed his cash in the box the addict had prised open the box with an oxy welder only to gamble the total sum immediately.

Rob spoke of stories of serendipity and in particular Linda's. He recalled Linda's conversation regarding the calling of the gun at night. He spoke of Linda's importance and her role as Senior Councilor and the fact she had to travel through this tremendous low point in her life as a problem gambler in order for her to become a better person. Rob explained that this is the beauty of these people when they come through recovery it can lead them to become incredible human beings.

Rob then gave me the opportunity to ask the attendees questions. I asked a number of brief questions these included:-

Q. *“If gambling were not available to you, do you feel you would have been in the same mental and emotional situation you are in right now?”*

A. Without exception all attendees answered “yes”. Each of the attendees explained that it wasn’t about the actual act of gambling, it was about an emptiness that they felt and an illness that they had. They felt that gambling filled this emptiness, and if it wasn’t gambling it could have been something else i.e. sex, drugs or alcohol, indeed any other compulsion.

At this point in time Dr. Hunter began to speak of the importance of people understanding the minds of addicts are wired differently to others. Rob went onto to explain the importance of the session’s attendees in understanding not to associate the symptoms of the addiction with the actual addiction. Rob spoke of Rita saying she gambled because of her unhappy marriage. Rob said “your unhappy marriage is your unhappy marriage and your problem gambling is your problem gambling, in many ways the two are separate issues”.

Rob used the example - if he had an argument with his wife he may walk out the door and sit at a table and gamble but he would sit there all night pontificating over the issue and still be upset, whereas the problem gambler would sit at the table and feel euphoric, almost anesthetized, to the issue owing to the act of gambling and that in itself is the problem.

Rob also spoke of some of the insane decisions that problem gamblers can make justifying their actions. He told the story of the Catholic Priest who was in debt to a loan shark for \$1000. When the Priest was unable to pay the loan shark, the loan shark threatened to out the priest to his Bishop. This priest in Rob’s words “was one of the kindest, most gentle God fearing men and had been an exceptional priest to the community”. The priest in panic of being ousted took \$300 from the poor box and placed a bet on a 4 to 1 odds horse. His mindset being (that of a deluded gambler) “if this horse comes home I will repay the loan shark, put more money in the poor box and then be able to continue God’s work”. In fact, I have to take this money and place this bet (as Rob explains I must continue to do that which is killing me). The horse lost and the Priest shot himself.

Rob went on then to explain that it’s not about the amount of money. On one hand we have the Priest shooting himself over \$300 and on the other hand we have Rita who had embezzled \$600,000 – it’s about the illness - the compulsive disorder of having to gamble.

I then asked my second question which was:-

Q. *“Why do you believe this centre has the highest rate of success and what makes it successful to you?”*

A. Dr. Hunter answered that he believed that it was the fact that they took a holistic approach to deal with the issues of the addict. GA dealt with the power example and assisting them with the strength for total abstinence through the 12 Step Program (see page 19), Linda dealt with the spiritual and emotional issues, with Dr. Hunter educating the attendees with the clinical and scientific answers to the issues behind addictions in problem gambling in helping them understand what their actual illness is.

At this point the session was concluded.

The 12 Step Program

Step 1 - We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable

Step 2 - Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity

Step 3 - Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God

Step 4 - Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

Step 5 - Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human beings the exact nature of our wrongs

Step 6 - Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

Step 7 - Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings

Step 8 - Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all

Step 9 - Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others

Step 10 - Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it

Step 11 - Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out

Step 12 - Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs

2009

THE LAS VEGAS PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE



As you are aware, our organisation has forged a strong synergy with Dr. Rob Hunter, Professor Bo Bernhard and the staff of the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre. They have been instrumental in ensuring our organisation is on the absolute vanguard in its corporate responsibility towards issues relating to problem gambling. They have also been extremely co-operative in assisting us set up best practices in clinical procedures in dealing with this disease when setting up Foundation House. Dr. Hunter allows me each year to sit in his group therapy sessions as an observer (something he allows very seldom). Where GA (Gamblers Anonymous) meetings deal with the 12 Steps and are led by people in recovery, for people in recovery, the clinician group sessions take a more medical approach (both scientifically and emotionally).

12 STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over gaming, and that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of Gods will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we carried this message to others who game excessively and practiced these principles in all our affairs.

This particular therapy was headed by Dr. Hunter and had six (6) patients. In the past I have attended numerous therapy sessions, however, this one was quite unique as all his patients were fairly young in recovery. In general, they were extremely emotionally fragile with constant moments of anger, anxiety and deep regret.

The sessions started with Rob introducing me and asking each of the patients to explain how they felt that day and briefly share their story.

Janine was a 42 year old wife and mother who hadn't gambled in 14 days. She spoke of having a feeling of great hope despite the many issues she now has to deal with. She also spoke of the great shame she felt and many of the acts she had committed to obtain money to gamble. Janine was finding it difficult to understand why she did what she did (Janine stopped paying school fees for her children to ensure she had money to maintain her gambling habit, as well as using mortgage repayments). At this point Rob Hunter interjected and spoke that shame was not an unusual feeling associated with this addiction.

Rob also spoke of PET Scans which were currently being used to monitor the brains of human beings and explained that the scans of an addictive human being would look very different to those who did not suffer from this mental illness. *"You have to get over your feelings of guilt, you are not a weak person, you are not a bad person, you simply suffer from a mental illness. One we don't have a cure for but we can treat it. This is a science."*

Gina was a 24 year old cocktail waitress at a Casino on the Strip. She too also spoke of feelings of great hope as she had not gambled in two (2) weeks, and this in fact was the longest period she can recall that she had not gambled. Gina spoke of how she was living at home and came from a practicing Christian family. She spoke of the guilt associated when lying to her parents regarding the tips she had earned each evening. *"I earned something like \$300 in tips each night, I'd gamble say \$200 each night and tell my parents I only earned \$100. When I confessed to my family they were so supportive. My father even installed a drop safe in my car where I would directly after each shift, drop my cash into the safe of which he only had the key. It eventually didn't work. I would either not drop the money in it at all, only drop some of the money or one night, stole the key and stole money from myself. That's the craziness of this disease."* At this point Rob Hunter interjected and spoke of the ingenuity and intelligence that normally went hand in hand with this disease. *"You guys are incredible. I'm constantly surprised at some of the ingenious ways you guys obtain money so you can gamble."*

Jim was a 55 year old mountain of a man who is heavily tattooed and is a Vietnam veteran and called himself "Cowboy". Cowboy explained he was feeling hopeful as he produced a wadful of notes from his pocket exclaiming *"two weeks ago I couldn't of had this in my pocket, I would have been sitting at some machine hypnotized into thinking I was going to hit the big one."* Cowboy spoke of his other addictions to drugs and alcohol. He also spoke that this was his third relapse. At this point in time, Rob spoke of relapses stating that *"once you relapse you never start from where you left off. In fact, people who relapse always plunge further into the depths of the vortex."* Cowboy concurred and stated that he never wanted to go back to where he was. He called it "that dark place".

Lloyd was a 34 year old casino worker whose wife and children had recently left him owing to his gambling. Lloyd spoke of the great despair he felt and constant thoughts of some how turning things around to bring back his wife and children. Lloyd had not gambled in approximately 10 days and he felt that with each day he was getting stronger. Rob Hunter commented that indeed this was true – that with length of abstinence comes strength.

Perry was a 28 year old advertising executive (currently unemployed owing to pending court sentencing for Fraud). Perry was extremely anxious and addressed the therapy session in tears. He spoke of how he was living in his car and the night before last came to his lowest point where he had to defecate in a dumpster. Perry spoke of how he had an incredible memory for insignificant things, how he could remember the finest detail of moments and items, but yet could not fathom why he could not remember the desolate feeling each time he binged gambled. At this point Perry could not go on. Rob Hunter adjourned the session for a brief time where he took Perry into his office for further therapy.

Yolander was a 40 year old woman who had not gambled or drank in seven (7) days. Yolander spoke of how when she was writing her letter of "goodbye" to alcohol and gambling (this is a common therapy exercise). Yolander explained how she just couldn't write it because *"all I wanted to do was grab a drink and sit in front of a machine and blank myself out from the rest of the world"*. Rob Hunter explained that that's OK, as sometimes in life it's hard to say goodbye to many things we have become accustomed to. The most important thing is that she hadn't picked up the bottle or gone to a casino to gamble.

Martha is a 65 year old African American woman whose son is an extremely high profile politician in Congress. Martha spoke of how she felt hopeful that she had turned her life around. She also spoke of her frustration, how she as a self educated and intelligent black woman, who had achieved a Phd, could let herself fall into this situation (Martha's husband had to take out a second mortgage on their family home as she had gone into debt of over half a million dollars). Martha then spoke of how her gambling had affected her family. One son refused to speak to her about it while the other approached her and attempted to deal with the issue. At this point in time Rob Hunter interjected and explained to me that Martha's was a special situation in as far as she had no option but to attend the clinic, as this was a condition placed on her by her son who paid off more than \$350,000 off her gambling debt. Rob explained that this was not a normal practice, but in Martha's place he was prepared to make an exception. Martha has not gambled in two (2) months and claims she has no intention of returning to the dark place she came from.

At this stage, Rob handed over to myself and asked if I had any comments or questions that I would like to address to the group session. I posed the question to the group - what did they believe is the greatest misconception the community has about their illness. Martha quickly replied *"it's that we are weak"*. Janine claimed that people seem to have a misconception that *"it's something we like to do. I hate gambling"* she said. *"I hate the act, I hate myself after I do it"*. Gina agreed. Cowboy then commented that *"it's an illness"* (to which Rob Hunter agreed).

Cowboy further commented *"we just want people to understand us. I don't want people to feel sorry for me, there needs to be more education programs out there so all these misconceptions can be lifted from the public's mind."* At this point, I thanked the patients for allowing me to attend group session and Rob Hunter closed the session.

Footnotes:

Two (2) evenings after this meeting whilst dining with Rob Hunter, Rob received a phone call where Cowboy had attempted to commit suicide after returning home to the news that his wife had left him and his son had been injured in Afghanistan.

Perry was responsible for producing one of the country's most successful Budweiser Beer commercials and was touted as one of the most talented marketing executives in the country. Apparently he had made a fortune from just this commercial alone – he is now destitute.

2010

LAS VEGAS PROBLEM GAMBLING CENTRE



John R. commenced the session by beginning to share his background. He had been one of Las Vegas's leading lawyers. His speciality was dealing in trust funds for many of Las Vegas's leading entertainers; Wayne Newton, Barbara Streisand and Celine Dion were just some of his clients. John had become addicted to draw card poker machines. He estimated he had put approximately \$1M through these machines. His moment of truth came when he started to consider ways of skimming from the trust funds. *"I never took anything but I found myself devising schemes on being able to do it and then I just said "what the hell are you doing."*

John described himself as a narcissistic ego maniac with an inferiority complex to which all the other 11 attendees nodded and agreed. John spoke of the importance in understanding the difference between abstinence and recovery *"abstinence is one thing, but don't confuse it with recovery, just because I'm not drinking or gambling or taking drugs doesn't mean I'm well. To get peace and recovery you must follow the 12 Step Program.* John explained his need to build up filters which help him deal with temptation. He chooses not to drink as he believes that it lowers his inhibitions which could lead to gambling. He works out at the gym every day; he has made a conscious decision to cease relationships with anybody whom he used to gamble with.

John says *"I don't want to disrespect alcoholism, drug addiction or any other illness but as gambling addicts we have to carry the very bullets that kill us in our pocket."* By this John went on to explain that alcoholics in recovery don't carry around a hip flask of bourbon nor do drug addicts carry heroine. *"However, as a problem gambler I need to carry money in my pocket as it is part of our currency in everyday living."*

THE RECOVERY PROGRAM

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over gambling, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.
7. Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having made an effort to practise these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

John went on to explain how he is constantly reminded and tempted and that everyday things that normal people take for granted could act as a trigger for him. For example, he spoke of recently sitting at his PC where he entered in the letters AAA and then accidentally entered in a fourth "A." He spoke of the unbelievable excitement this triggered as it represented four aces. He spoke of his immediate urge to go out and gamble. John also spoke of even as recently on the way to this session, his car trip meter turned over to 7777 *"to normal people this may not mean much but to a compulsive excessive it triggered an excitement in me at the thought of a poker machine jackpot."* John continued to speak of *"this is why we need filters to support us and maintain diligence in the 12 Steps."*

John then began to speak of his new wife who 48 hours prior gave birth to their first son. At this point he began to become emotional. John went on to speak of his wife nearly dying owing to haemorrhaging and that their child was born with severe handicaps as well as cerebral palsy.

At this point John sobbed uncontrollably. After what seemed an eternity John composed himself and said the reason why he had shared this was that every fibre in his body wanted to use this situation as an excuse to gamble, however, it was only through his diligence in maintaining recovery through the 12 Steps that stopped him from falling out of recovery. *"This is where I feel most comfortable, sharing with people like you here at the problem gambling centre. Here is my well of strength."* At this point John thanked the group for letting him share.

Rob Hunter thanked John and introduced Gordy.

Gordy introduced himself as a 65 year old alcohol, drug and gambling addict. He is an ex Vietnam Vet and is currently a senior councillor at the Problem Gambling Centre. Gordy only spoke briefly but talked of the importance of not being "romanced." By this he meant by giving yourself excuses that it was OK to have just one drink, make one bet or sniff one line of cocaine. He also emphasised John's point that there can be no recovery unless there is abstinence. Gordy also spoke of living his life one day at a time and that each day is just a daily reprieve.

Gordy spoke of the filter he uses to assist him when he feels triggers which is to remember the last minute of the last time he either drank, took drugs or gambled. *"As you all know this is usually always our rock bottom. And whilst I never want to feel that way again, I never want to forget how I felt – it helps to protect me, from me."*

At this point Rob thanked Gordy and introduced Linda as an ex Las Vegas Show Girl and winner of Miss Las Vegas as well as one time Las Vegas's prominent female/show girl. Rob also mentioned that Linda currently now holds the position of "Spiritual Counsellor" at the Las Vegas Problem Gambling Centre.

Linda commenced by stating that she was 65 years of age and a drug, gambling and alcohol addict. Linda spoke of her previous life as being selfish and spiritless. *"My life just revolved around me, not my children, not my husband, no-one but myself. It was all about fulfilling my selfish needs, whether it was clothes, cocaine, alcohol or gambling – it was all about me."* Linda spoke of college funds being spent as well as rent and savings and a total preoccupation with fulfilling her own needs at the expense of others. Linda spoke now of the importance of living her life by the 12 Steps and that her bank account does not truly reflect how rich and fulfilled she feels right now. *"I make myself get up every morning and walk outside barefoot and feel the grass and earth beneath my feet and I thank God for each day."* At this point Linda went on to speak of the importance of continued meetings and the following of the 12 Step program.

Rob thanked Linda and then concluded with a brief summary of reminding the attendees of maintaining diligence in completing their self audit worksheets as well as attendance to clinician sessions and meetings. The meeting then concluded.

2011

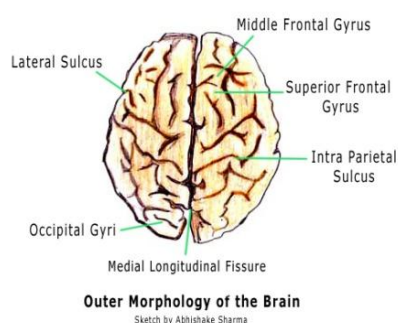
CLINICIAN LECTURE

"The Human Brain, and the Science of Problem Gambling"

Rob Hunter began the lecture on explaining the true experts in understanding the mindset of the problem gambler and those in long term recovery were the addicts themselves. However, there were documented aspects of the medical science revolving around the makeup and brain of those affiliated with the compulsive gambling disorder. Rob mentioned that problem gambling was diagnosed as a medical disorder by the American Medical Journal in 1980 owing to much of the work of Rob's then mentor, Dr. Custer.



Rob spoke of the brain being made up of three (3) parts; the back part is called the "cerebral", the centre called the "mid brain" with the front of the brain called the "front lobe". Dr. Hunter explained the front lobe as "Shakespeare", this is the creative part of our brain, with the back cerebral controlling all of our involuntary actions such as blinking, heart beat or breathing. The mid brain is to do with all things relating to survival such as fight, flight and freeze e.g. hunger and sex.



Rob Hunter then went on to ways of being able to monitor the actions of the brain through PET (Positron Emitting Tomography) scans. Dr. Hunter went on to explain that with viewing such scans, doctors can monitor our D2 receptors. D2 receptors are responsible for our dopamine levels. A PET scan will show D2 receptors for an addict are misaligned, as opposed to that of a normal human being. The D2 receptors are responsible for the human mind's dopamine levels. Dopamine levels will control our sense of euphoria. When the D2 receptors are misaligned like that of the addict, these dopamine levels will spike completely skewed to that of a normal person. Dr. Hunter explained that our brain's dopamine level travels like a car on a highway.

Sometimes in the brain of a normal human being these levels will shift from side to side from within that highway, however, those who have D2 receptors that are skewed, (such as those of the addict) the dopamine levels will skew way outside the lines of the highway.

These dopamine levels have been traced to spike whilst gamblers are in action or at the thought of being in action. Dr. Hunter then spoke about the spikes not being actual acts of pleasure, but rather the blocking of all feelings in the form of anaesthesia. Over time these spike of dopamine become higher and higher, this is mirrored in the human's action of either drinking or gambling more and more often. "This", Rob Hunter said, "is the science of addiction".

Overview

Chemical messengers in the body exert their effects by binding to receptors, much like a key fits in a lock to open a door. The nerve messenger dopamine mediates multiple important effects in the brain, and its activity is tightly regulated through a complex system of receptors with different functions located at various sites throughout the brain.

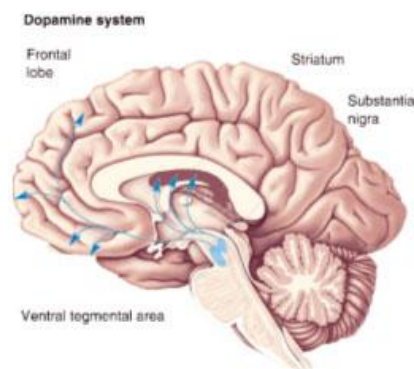
Definition

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter, a chemical released by nerves to communicate with other nerves or with muscles. Dopamine is released into space between nerves called a synapse. It diffuses across the space and binds to specific molecules called dopamine receptors in the membranes of the cells on the other side of the synapse. Receptor binding sets off electrical changes in the cell. Dopamine and its receptors are found in parts of the brain concerned with movement, reward-seeking, and learning and memory. When dopamine binds the D2 receptor, it activates the extra-pyramidal system of the brain, the functional network of the brain that controls posture and the start and stop of movements. People with Parkinson's disease develop tremors and other symptoms because they lack adequate levels of dopamine to normally stimulate the D2 receptors. Patients suffering from schizophrenia have problems with their dopamine system, especially the actions of D3 and D4 receptors that are heavily involved in processing thoughts. Drug addiction powerfully stimulates dopamine release, to the point where the body scales back the production and activity of dopamine receptors to try to compensate. Over time, the lack of receptor activity makes the brain less able to respond to normal levels of dopamine.

Author: Susan T. McClure (Biologist) References: Merck Manual

(Neurotransmission/Parkinson's
Manual (Parkinson's Disease)
Institute of Drug Abuse: Science of

Merck
National
Addiction



Rob explained that not all addicts participate in their addiction, for example, you can have dry alcoholics or problem gamblers not in action. However, when looking at a holistic approach to dealing with problem gamblers, the emotional scars and turmoil that can act as triggers to drinking or gambling also need to be addressed.

These spiritual and emotional issues are where the 12 Step programme of Gamblers Anonymous and Alcoholic Anonymous take on monumental importance. Dr. Hunter went on to explain that not dissimilar to not having any control over the colour of our eyes, it is similar to that of having misaligned D2 receptors. However, we can make lifestyle decisions as to how we would deal with these matters e.g. deciding not to drink or gamble should we have misaligned D2 receptors.

Dr. Hunter finished the session by explaining that while these spikes in dopamine for those who remain in action or drinking will spike higher and higher (i.e. gamblers will need to gamble more and more often or alcoholics drink more often to reach the euphoria), they too in time, can reset through extended periods of abstinence, with the dopamine levels moving and responding within the “highways” of the normal D2 receptor human beings.

PROBLEM GAMBLING CLINICIAN SESSION WITH CLIENTS

Rob Hunter started the session by talking about the infliction of problem gambling can tend to alienate them and hence it is extremely important that the group individuals reach out to one another, and equally, the importance of attending such sessions along with GA meetings. In attendance to this session was a 30 year old male who reported that he had lost everything. He was six (6) months without being in action. He reported having recently attended two (2) funerals which he said in some ironic way proved to him the importance of life and how alive he felt by not gambling. He then went on to say that had he not been in recovery and gambling he would have blown off his friends funerals and found an excuse not to attend, so he could continue gambling.

The next addict to share was a 45 year old male lawyer who claimed he too had lost everything. He went on to convey that along with whatever financial wealth he had he also lost his wife, his law practice as well as cheated money out of many of his friends. He spoke about his lowest point being when he was lying on the lounge room floor of a cheap Las Vegas motel weeping while he had the barrel of a shotgun in his mouth.

The next addict was a 50 year old female who was six (6) months clean from action and she explained how the simple things in life were now giving her great joy; something as simple as the sheer exhilaration of skiing down a mountain meant so much to her, whereas when she was in action, she felt numb and without any feelings.

After this was a 78 year old lady who immediately began to weep, explaining that she was so caught up in gambling that she had totally ignored her children, and as a result, her husband was left to bring up her children. She never attended any simple events such as school presentations or sports games and feels that she betrayed her children. She then went on to explain that it is only now that she is beginning to know her 47 year old daughter she ignored.

Dr. Hunter concluded the session by explaining that what many addicts call a “high” when they are in action, they are actually describing numbness and the inability to feel, shutting out emotions and feelings. Therefore, it stands to reason that once they begin their journey of abstinence and recovery, they begin to learn to feel again and simple pleasures are re-learned and felt, and something as simple as waking up to a new day is celebrated.

The session then closed with the recital of the Serenity Prayer:

*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference”*
