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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

COVID-19 Pandemic: A Great Concern to Addiction Problem

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Dear Editor

As a result of the current novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the general healthcare system is battling with recognizable challenges in delivering patient care. Both the patients and healthcare providers are at risk of COVID-19 exposure (Jain et al., 2020). Necessary coronavirus containment measures, like physical distancing and closures of public spaces, are making it harder for people with substance use disorders to seek help, keep up their treatment regimen, or access social support. Individuals who smoke tobacco, vape, marijuana, or use opioids face more significant risks related to novel COVID-19. These substances' have adverse effects on respiratory and pulmonary systems (Arsenault, 2020). Thus, people with an addiction problem may have an immediate and longer-term threat to their health due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The common danger may not be from the novel virus only. However, some consequences of physical

distancing may arise, such as access to necessary treatment and recovery resources. Several studies reported an increase in drug use in recession times because of the consequences of unemployment on psychological distress. The latest report examining industry substance use and addiction trends showed that individuals in the accommodations and food services industry had the highest illegal drug use in the past month and the highest rate of substance use disorder in the past year (Arsenault, 2020).

Addiction is a severe illness but is neglected (in most cases). People whose addiction becomes out of control deserve help and treatment as much as anyone experiencing any other condition, be it physical or mental (Earp et al., 2017). At the end of the current pandemic, there must be the need for more adequately resourced and robust addiction services. We hope that this collective experience will lead to a kinder and more compassionate society. All

those vulnerable to addiction are no longer stigmatized but instead offered the help and support they so sorely need (Bannister, 2020). The exact effect of long-term isolation can be destructive for those who struggle with addiction, more especially drug and alcohol addiction. The addicts typically hide their situation from their family members, and because of a stay-at-home order, most of them can't hide it anymore (Truttschel, 2020). From 1997 to 2017 in America, over 700,000 people died from a drug overdose. Alcohol and drug addiction cost the U.S. economy more than \$600 billion annually. About 34.2 million people in America were arrested in 2017 for drunken driving, more than 60% were under alcohol, and the rest were influenced by drugs (Truttschel, 2020).

It's so difficult for the people recovering from substance use disorder to maintain sobriety with their routine uprooted, and during the novel COVID-19 pandemic, many of them are relapsing. The feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and boredom are to engineer these relapses. However, social support and active involvement in the program play a huge role in recovery. Since long ago, many studies have reported the association between social isolation and addiction. However, isolation hurts the treatment outcomes (Hudson, 2020). It is normal to relapse during the drug and alcohol recovery process; about 40% to 60% of people in recovery have at least a single relapse before reaching sobriety. Some estimate this number to be as high as 90% (Hudson, 2020). Experts stated that stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines might present additional challenges to those recovering from an addiction. When people are recovering from a drug or alcohol addiction, it's essential to have a community and accountability. Also, social distancing is a part of our addiction treatment process for now (Knowledge & Insights, 2020). During the locked-down period, newer behavioral addictions could emerge, especially for the teens (Kar et al., 2020). Addiction is a chronic disease. However, it can be prevented and treated. During the pandemic, some people may be isolated at home alone while others are separated from

their families. The family needs to act as a support system by paying attention to the warning signs of relapse if a family member is recovering from drug addiction or alcohol. Experts recommend taking care of the body by getting proper sleep, exercising, and eating a healthy diet. Everyone should also stick to a schedule and keep in touch with friends and family.

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