

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ADDICTION VERSUS DEPENDENCE: CARRYING THE DEBATE FORWARD

Dear Editor:

As we move closer toward the fifth edition of DSM, the debate on what of the previous edition of this widely accepted and followed classificatory system in mental and behavioral disorders needs to be kept and what needs to be replaced by the earlier descriptions or more recent views on the specific issues is continuing.

Hereby, I would like to give a consideration to the case of those suffering from the somatization disorder with the main complaint of pain and being prescribed the opioid analgesics. These individuals by virtue of the play of the underlying defense mechanisms and coping strategies tend to experience pain (the most uncomfortable of the symptom, perhaps) which could not be explained by a rational medical (physical) explanation. They would require management of the pain and underlying condition (conscious or unconscious) to relieve the suffering. This frequently means use of analgesics, at least on a short-term basis, till alternative ways of dealing with the condition could be worked through during the therapeutic procedure. Similarly, those needing the opioid analgesics for their pain secondary to the physical cause might need a progressively increasing dose of these substances which some individuals tend to abuse. The debate over labeling the behavior of these individuals in terms of their demand for the pain relieving substance (the only respite from the pain), progressive increase in the dose (tolerance), emergence of withdrawals, preoccupation with the future availability of the pain relief (which happens to be through use of opioids), and the use of these substances in spite of the awareness of the possible or even evident complications (at the cost of the relief in pain) would require a clarification what dependence and addiction stand for.

The DSM V could make use of exclusion criteria so often used in the current version of DSM IV in

almost all other categories ie, *the need to rule out the possibility that the criteria of substance dependence is being met because of the underlying general medical or other psychological/psychiatric condition.* Such an approach would mean that the individuals who are fulfilling the criteria for dependence or addiction because of the underlying physical or psychological conditions like cancer pain or somatization disorder presenting with pain would not be labeled as dependent users/abusers of these substances. However, since this could create a difficulty in terms of maintaining the uniformity of the diagnostic manual, the other possibility could be use of a specifier—*(possibly) due to underlying physical or psychological condition*—with recording the underlying physical or psychological condition on the relevant axis. This would mean that the use of the substance in dependent or abusive pattern not only gets the desired attention, but also the underlying cause of the condition ie, primary physical and psychological disorder would get the equally important assessment and intervention—something that could subsequently alter one of the manifestation or consequences of the primary condition ie, substance dependence or addiction, whatever the word we agree upon.¹

Yatan Pal Singh Balhara, MD, DNB
Senior Resident Doctor, All India Institute of
Medical Sciences (AIIMS)
New Delhi, India
National Drug Dependence Treatment
Center (NDDTC)
New Delhi, India

Shachi Mathur, MA, CHt, PhD Scholar
Jamia Milia Islamia University
Delhi, India

REFERENCE

1. O'Brien CP, Volkow N, Li T-K: What's in a word? Addiction versus dependence in DSM-V. *Am J Psychiatry.* 2006; 163: 764-765.