

## THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN GAMBLING AND DRUG ADDICTION

I have written much over the years about drug addiction. There is, however, another addiction that is destructive and disruptive, even if it does not destroy the body as drug abuse does.

I refer to gambling as an addiction. There are countless people who bet a few pesos on the lotto and gamble small change on card games. They are not the ones I wish to focus on. I have found in my experience working with drug addicts that many of them (especially the men) are also addicted to gambling. And their gambling is pathological. Meaning that it is a “progressive disorder characterized by a continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling: a pre-occupation with gambling or obtaining money with which to gamble; irrational thinking, and a continuation of the behavior despite adverse consequences.” (Rosenthal).

The American Psychiatric Association’s criteria for diagnosing gambling addiction are similar to those for alcohol and other drugs.

Experts have found that pathological gamblers (gambling addicts) also can build up a measure of tolerance. Just as the drug addict tends to increase his dosage, the gambling addict needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money (or make increasingly risky bets with the money that is available to him) to achieve the desired high. For some gamblers, often referred to as “action” gamblers, this effect may be excitement according to the researchers Cocco, Yesieur, and Rosenthal.

Researchers have also found that for another type of gambler, called “escape” gamblers, the sought for effect is relief from painful emotions or stress.

Consequently, gambling may act as a stimulant such as amphetamine or cocaine for some gambling addicts, while acting as a sedative or tranquilizer for others.

When attempting to stop their gambling, gambling addicts often report withdrawal-like symptoms. These may include irritability, problems focusing or concentrating, difficulty sleeping and even physical symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, headaches and muscular pain.

There are differences, however. It may be more difficult to define what constitutes gambling rather than to define a drug or alcoholic drink. Gambling can mean many things: playing the lottery and cards for money, investing in the stock market, betting on raffles, on golf, horse races and basketball games.

Pathological gamblers all have one thing in common. Their gambling disrupts their lives and the lives of those closest to them. Those who love them see their gambling as self-destructive; they think it should be stopped.

When you add drugs and alcohol to the mix, then you have a sure combination for disaster.