

Dual Diagnosis

This fact sheet will give some background information on the psychiatric condition commonly labelled Dual Diagnosis and how to find help through statutory and voluntary sector organisations in Harrow in addition to national organisations. Most of this information has been sourced from the Mind Leaflet on Dual Diagnosis:

What is dual diagnosis?

This is a term applied to the mental ill health of people who experience both mental illness and drug or alcohol abuse. There is debate among health professionals whether substance misuse by people with mental health problems can lead to increased symptoms. There is also new evidence that use of illicit drugs among young adults can be a trigger for mental ill health.

Dual diagnosis is a common problem for both mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment services. It is suggested that 30 to 50 per cent of people with mental health problems also have current drug or alcohol issues. Nevertheless it is also clear that many people who use illicit drugs or alcohol do not have mental health problems.

Impact of drug/alcohol use on mental health

The drugs can be split into three groups: those that can directly cause mental health problems; those that can aggravate or exacerbate mental health problems; those that people use to relieve mental health problems.

Drugs that can directly cause mental health problems

Stimulant drugs, such as amphetamine cocaine and khat, if used for a long time can cause hallucinations, paranoia, restlessness, agitation and very distressing thoughts. A high intake of alcohol can also cause symptoms of psychosis, particularly hallucinations and paranoia. It is also linked to low moods and physical problems with withdrawing.

Drugs that can aggravate mental health problems

Cannabis, LSD, stimulants and ecstasy can all amplify a person's mood. If they are already feeling low, paranoid or anxious, the drugs may make this worse, but they can also lift mood. Opiates (including opium, heroin, methadone) have a calming effect. However, the user is likely to become 'tolerant' of the drug, and need to increase the dose to achieve the same effect.

Drugs that people use to relieve mental health problems

Some people suggest that certain combinations of drugs or alcohol relieve mental health problems. This self-medication may be for symptoms of distress, or may sometimes help relieve the unpleasant effects of prescribed medication. Mental health services do not support self-medication, and most agree that illicit drugs or alcohol generally worsen mental health problems.

Do psychiatric drugs and illicit drugs affect each other?

When two or more drugs are taken at the same time, they may interact with one another; one drug changing the effect of the other. One of them may become toxic, or its effects may be lost or increased. A person's age, weight, genetic make-up and general health will make a difference to the way the drugs impact. Taking street drugs is more risky if the person is on another prescription medicine, or if they already have health problems. It may interfere with treatment or make the illness worse.

What about withdrawal?

The effects of withdrawing from many illicit drugs can produce, or mimic, symptoms of mental ill health. Alcohol withdrawal can cause anxiety, insomnia, hallucinations (commonly visual), and clouded thinking. Coming off stimulants often results in confusion, irritability and low mood. It sometimes makes people feel suicidal. Withdrawing from opiates can cause unpleasant physical effects. Opiates can sometimes mask intense emotions, which may emerge once people stop taking them.

What help is available?

When a person is assessed, the professionals decide whether drug / alcohol abuse or mental ill health is the main problem, and direct them to the relevant specialist service. There can be differences of view about this, but in Harrow the Drug and Alcohol Service and Community Mental Health Teams work closely together.

Practical problems

A major problem for people with a dual diagnosis is housing. Many housing agencies and supported housing trusts will not accept drug users. People also need assistance with welfare and benefits. They may need legal advice and general health care.

Treatment approaches

Treatment approaches that have benefited people with a dual diagnosis, include cognitive behavioural therapy; counselling, especially when drug or alcohol intake is linked to family or social problems. In some instances, drug intervention can be useful. Frequently, consistent practical support and regular contact with a named professional are most useful.

Local Statutory Services

Accident and Emergency

(Northwick Park Hospital) Watford Road, Harrow HA1 3UJ.

Tel: 020 8864 3232

Web: www.nwlh.nhs.uk

Harrow Connexions Youth Stop

Youth Stop 88 College Road, Harrow HA1 1BQ

Tel: 020 8427 8617

Fax: 020 8861 1168

Enquiries email: enquiries@lclondon.co.uk

Website: www.harrow4u.co.uk

For young people aged 13-19 years old or up to 25 if they have a learning difficulty. Help with problems, including drug and alcohol.

Harrow Drug Intervention Programme (DIP)

333A Station Road, Harrow HA1 2AA

Tel: 0208 8515 7830 Email: Harrow@wdp-drugs.org.uk

Web: www.wdp-drugs.org.uk

DIP provides a through care/aftercare service to offenders.

Compass Harrow

The 21 Building, 21 Pinner Road, Harrow, HA1 4ES

Tel: 020 8861 2787

Fax: 020 8863 3139

Email: info@compass-uk.org

Web: www.compass-uk.org

Specialist service for people with substance misuse problems.

Local Voluntary Organisations

Alcoholics Anonymous Support to deal with a drink problem on a day to day basis. Please phone or visit the website for all current venues and times for the meetings

Tel: 0845 769 7555 Email: help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Web: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

EACH (Ethnic Alcohol Counselling for Hounslow & Harrow)

Ground Floor, Signal House, 16 Lyon Road HA1 2AG.

Tel: 020 8861 3884.

Fax: 020 8863 9400.

Email: info@eachharrow.org.uk

Web: www.eachcounselling.org.uk/harrowv

One to one counselling and support programme for adults and young people (11-25) with an alcohol or related problem, including mental health.

Metropolitan Support Trust

32 Harrow View, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1RG.

Tel: 020 8863 2277; 020 8863 2157.

Fax: 020 8863 2090

Local Drug and Alcohol Support Scheme that helps divert people with drug and alcohol misuse history away from homelessness.

Private Sector Services

Cygnnet Hospital, London Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex HA1 3JL.

Tel: 020 8966 7000

Fax: 020 8864 6092.

email: harrowadmin@cygnethealth.co.uk

Web: www.cygnethealth.co.uk

A private clinic whose options include an addictions programme. Accepts self referrals.

National Organisations

DrugScope

Publishes a wide range of material

4th Floor, Asra House, 1 Long Lane, London, SE1 4PG

Tel: 020 7234 9730

Fax: 020 7234 9773

web: www.drugscope.org.uk

Phoenix Futures

Treatment services for drug and alcohol users across the UK

Phoenix House

3rd Floor, Asra House, 1 Long Lane, London SE1 4PG

tel. 020 7234 9740 email: info@phoenix-futures.org.uk

web: www.phoenix-futures.org.uk

Release

For drug users, families, friends and professionals

124-128 City Road, London EC1V 2NJ

tel. 020 7324 2989 email: ask@release.org.uk

web: www.release.org.uk

Turning Point

Social care in the areas of drug and alcohol misuse:

Standon House, 21 Mansell Street London E1 8AA

tel. 020 7481 7600

email: info@turning-point.co.uk

web: www.turning-point.co.uk

FRANK

Information on drugs

Tel. 0300 123 6600

SMS: 82111

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

web: www.talktofrank.com

Websites

Dual Diagnosis

http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/psychological_effects_of_street_drugs

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