Alcohol

This month, the "Take Charge of Your Health" topic is alcohol use. As noted earlier, many people rely on alcohol use as a coping mechanism. Jennifer J. Mair, MD, PhD, an actively engaged coordinator within the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (UPCI), and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, are discussing the topic.

Good afternoon, Ms. Bush. It’s always a pleasure to talk with you, especially before the busyness of the holiday season. This month our focus is on alcohol use. This is a topic that we’ve never focused on in these “Take Charge” pages.

EB: I am glad we are talking about alcohol use and abuse. There is a fine line between the two. We all know that because the legal drinking age in the United States is 21, we are spending a lot of time and attention on alcohol use and telling minors, the younger population, to not drink. Sometimes I think that we are also saying to at least educated adults on the subject. It’s not as black and white. It seems to look forward to a glass of wine at the end of the day or a beer at the barway as a way to relax and as a typical part of socializing. We can have a hard time figuring out when, where, or if use turns to abuse.

JJ: That is very true. Our work shows that the biggest increase is in alcohol use in a positive context. For instance, sometimes, one drink leads to two, which leads to three and four.

EB: Dr. Mair, Jennifer, what does research tell us about alcohol use and the impact of drinking for the African American community who focus on alcohol and who are socially isolated?

JJ: Where we are, there is an interest in whether it is related to social disconnection from others who respond differently to alcohol use. The most obvious reason why we have seen a decrease is that one person has a drink and then instead of taking their problem to their doctor to solve it, the other person doesn’t. It is sometimes a reaction to where we live, the environment, or maybe drinking more than any population in the United States. Even in communities where you don’t think Americans drink less, we have seen a change in behavior.

EB: However, we have also seen a change in behavior that it’s not just Black neighborhoods or communities where there are eight times more livers affected by alcohol than White neighborhoods.

JJ: That is interesting, I was remembering that Dr. Mair was speaking in the Pittsburg area that the environment as being a factor for those who respond differently to alcohol use. I know that alcohol use is linked to many negative outcomes that may not be obvious at the community level—violence, criminal activity, incarceration, and child neglect. I am glad that we have Dr. Mair here today to talk about Familylinks, Alcoholics Anonymous, and UPCI’s UPMC Health Plan addiction programs for those struggling with alcohol use.

CTSI Research Participant Registry

The Research Participant Registry is a database of people who have volunteered to contribute to research studies. This registry can be for themselves or their children. It’s goal is to bring together people who can advance quickly and directly to those who can benefit from them. Although the registry is maintained by the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC, neither you nor your child need to be a patient in the UPMC health care system to sign up for the registry. When you sign yourself or your children up for the registry, you will begin to receive a periodic newsletter. It describes research findings, details of the research process and studies, and instructions on how to participate in research studies that you may consider joining or allowing your child to join. Participation is voluntary and confidential. Participants can take themselves or their children off from the registry at any time. If you are interested in learning more about the registry, please visit the following website:

www.researchregistry.pitt.edu.

Familylinks helps with all aspects of addiction treatment.

Everyone knows someone whose life has been affected by drugs or alcohol dependency. Drug and alcohol dependency take an enormous toll on all aspects of a person’s life. Care management and housing assistance are available. For parents of children with substance use disorders, the outpatient Support Recovery Center provides child care during treatment. Familylinks’ two Family Treatment Centers serve women who are pregnant or newborns, children, or incarcerated drug users and/or overdose survivors. For example, a mothers entering treatment is encouraged to bring up to two of her children (up to age 12) to live with her during her stay. The program supports women who are recovering medication-assisted therapy. Clients also attend Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings while in treatment.

Drug and alcohol dependency often co-occur with mental health disorders. Familylinks recognizes this. We offer help for clients who need additional mental health treatment. Substance abuse and overall mental health are linked. If you don’t address both, you may not succeed in address- ing either one.

Familylinks offers a variety of levels of care for those living with substance use disorders, including medication-assisted treatment and individual counseling. For more information, visit www.familylinks.org. To get help from Familylinks today, call 888-583-6003.

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