

With the burgeoning opioid epidemic in our nation, TADS felt it was important and timely to provide a primer for parents in dealing with substance abuse of their children or other loved ones. Our thanks to TADS Board member, Robin Young, who works as a psychiatric/substance abuse triage clinician and medical social worker at two area hospitals.

## Substance abuse treatment options and access to care

by Robin Young, LICSW

When seeking treatment for substance abuse/dependency, there are many different treatment options and each option occurs at a specific stage in an individual's recovery. This is often referred to as a *level of care*. The different *levels of care* include the following:

**Detoxification:** An evaluation to determine an individual's need for a medically supervised detoxification admission is an important first step in care. Last day of use, quantity of use, individual withdrawal symptoms, substance(s) being used all play a complex role in determining if a person requires an inpatient detoxification program or not. Knowing if you require a medically supervised inpatient detox program can be hard to determine on your own. It is strongly advised to present to your nearest Emergency Room requesting evaluation for detoxification. You will be provided with a medical and mental health evaluation to help make a determination about the appropriate next step in your recovery. You may also call your nearest Emergency Room behavioral health team or your [local mobile crisis team](#) to review some details around your substance abuse and mental health needs and can be given further direction from this conversation. If detoxification is needed, then conversations re: options available as well as specifics re: locations for treatment that contract with your insurance company/program can be made with you and your loved ones in the ER during the evaluation process. The average length of stay for an inpatient medically supervised detox is 3-5 days but varies dramatically based on your individual health and detoxification needs.

*Once you have completed a detoxification program, or if you are not found to require an inpatient detox program, there are several options for treatment available.*

**Partial Hospital Program:** In partial hospitalization, the patient continues to reside at home, but commutes to a treatment center 5 days a week from 9am-2pm (this varies based on the facility), with some programs occasionally offering weekend groups. Partial hospitalization focuses on the overall treatment of the individual, and is intended to avert or reduce in-patient hospitalization. Partial hospitalization programs can be provided in either a hospital setting or in a free-standing community mental health center (CMHC) or private programs. Treatment during a typical day may include psych-educational groups, skill building, social work care, psychiatric support, assessment for medications needed and check-ins re: sobriety. It is meant to provide intense support for those working on their sobriety usually in 2-3 weeks periods of treatment.

**SOAP Program (structured outpatient addiction program) or Intensive Outpatient Program (IOPs):** IOP and SOAP Programs are a short term, intensive treatment for people who benefit from weekly structure support around achieving and maintaining sobriety. These programs tend to also allow for individuals to be in school or back at work as services are provided allowing for attendance from 2-5 days a week with options for morning, afternoon or evening sessions based on the program. These programs provide group therapy, education, counseling and support along with social work, referrals and psychopharmacology support, as needed.

**Residential Programs:** Residential programming can occur in either under 30 day settings or programs offering over 30 day stays. These programs provide intensive, structured daily care, therapy and support along with the residential component. While there may be some residential programs that allow for one to detox at their program, in general, individuals move to residential treatment once they have completed detox (or may go sooner if no detox is needed). In general, residential programming historically has limited health insurance coverage and it is important to contact the substance abuse and mental health number on your insurance card to inquire about any coverage for residential care available to you. Alternatively, in researching residential substance abuse options, one can contact these programs directly to see what insurances they work with and if yours is accepted or if they are a private pay facility only. Residential care generally is not immediately available based on program bed availability and finances/insurance coverage and therefore is difficult to access during an emergency room evaluation. If you are in a detoxification program, you can discuss this option with your team social worker. If you are not in need of detox, you should contact the program and your insurance company to discuss options. Working with your therapist or psychiatrist is another option in determining if this level of care is available to you.

**Sober Housing:** Sober housing is longer term housing programs for individuals in recovery who are working on staying clean and sober. By living with peers who have completed or who are actively engaged in treatment programs or are involved with Alcoholics Anonymous or other 12 step programs, individuals in recovery reside with a supportive sober group of individuals who are also focused on their sobriety.

**12 Step Programming or Alternative Addiction Recovery Programs:** These include programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon or Nar-Anon (for supporting the families/loved ones of those struggling with addiction), Smart Recovery. All programs have strong online presence where one can access days/times of local meetings and support.

**Outpatient therapy/psychiatry:** Referrals to an outpatient substance abuse counselor or individual therapist can support the patient clinically in attaining substance abuse treatment goals and assess ongoing mental health needs. Psychiatric support may also be warranted to address underlying mental health needs and referral for pharmacological options, as needed and advised. Therapy and psychiatric support and monitoring will occur at various intensities based on individual need.

**ALL treatment options (or “levels of care”) need to be discussed/reviewed carefully within the context of your individual mental health and substance abuse needs as well as insurance coverage/financial options.**

For further information in assessing your next step in substance abuse treatment, and understanding where to begin, contacting your local Emergency Room's Behavioral Health Team or your local mobile crisis team can be very helpful in answering your questions further or directing you to the right place for further evaluation:

Emerson Hospital Behavioral Health Triage Team: 978-287-3516

To access your local Emergency Service Provider/Mobile Crisis Team, please use [this link](#) to view the Massachusetts directory and locate your town on the list for phone numbers for your mobile crisis team. These teams provide behavioral health/substance abuse crisis assessment, intervention and referrals in the community 24 hours per day/7 days per week/365 days per year:

## Supporting your loved ones during recovery:

It is important to remember that addiction is a disease like diabetes or cancer, not a personality flaw. And it is a disease that requires lifelong acceptance, treatment and support from family and friends. It's also important to remember that this disease not only impacts the individual who struggles with addiction, but also impacts the entire system of family and friends. All those involved within this system need help and support in the recovery and treatment process. As family and friends trying to support a loved one in recovery, please remember:

1. Always encourage and support your loved one in seeking treatment for their disease while understanding that each individual struggling with addiction must make each step for himself or herself on their own path to recovery.
2. Get educated about the disease of addiction. Here are some resources that are helpful in understanding this disease:
  - [The National Institute for Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#)
  - From the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA): [What is Substance Abuse Treatment: A Booklet for Families](#).
  - Other resources from SAMHSA: [Recovery and Recovery Support](#), [Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse](#), and [Prevention of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness](#).
  - [The Massachusetts Center for Health Information and Analysis \(CHIA\)](#)
3. Seek your own support. Before you can effectively offer support for your loved ones, you first need support for yourself. This is a critical part of the journey as it will help you to understand the most beneficial ways to support a loved one battling addiction while allowing you to address the impact your loved one's addiction has on yourself and your life and make effective decisions supporting the health of the entire family system. Seek out family support groups through [Al-Anon](#), [Nar-Anon](#), [NAMI](#) and many other substance abuse group support programs for families within your community as well as seek referrals for your own individual counseling, preferably with clinicians with skill in the area of supporting family's affected by addiction.