

## **'MIND Your Health' Webinar Episode 4: Addiction** **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **1. Can a person without any gambling experiences help a gambler?**

Yes, a person without any gambling experience can help a gambler. Having someone to support and encourage them, and provide hope, is helpful. In addition, one can also be the person to encourage and accompany them if they seek help.

### **2. Can childhood trauma lead to addiction later in life?**

Yes. Adverse childhood experiences such as trauma has been linked to drug and alcohol addictions later in the person's life. They are also at higher risk of mental health issues, which also increases the risk of developing addiction problems.

### **3. How do we correct the misperception that addiction is about willpower and that addicts who do not recover lack the willpower needed for recovery?**

Addiction is a psychiatric disorder. We don't expect someone with depression or other mental disorders to simply snap out of it through willpower. Determination to get better is an essential starting point, but recovery requires other strategies that have been shown to work.

### **4. Under what circumstances would an addict usually take the first step to seek help?**

Addiction is painful, stigmatizing, and sometimes life threatening. Sufferers seek help when they experience losses, such as loss in income, relationships, health, etc. One may also seek help because family and loved ones are ready to withdraw support unless the sufferer seeks professional help.

### **5. Can addiction be classified as a disease?**

Addiction is a psychiatric disorder.

### **6. Can porn addiction lead to a person committing a sexual offence?**

Not everyone who commits a sexual offence is a porn addict. Similarly, not every porn addict will commit a sexual crime. There are other factors.

**7. There are increasing narrative that Marijuana can be good for its user, claiming that THC is beneficial. How can we fight this type of narrative when addiction is known to be harmful?**

Yes, we are aware that there are places in the world that has legalised Marijuana. This does send a wrong signal, as we know the harmful effects of using this drug, not just dependence on it. Singapore has continued to enforce strict laws against the trafficking, possession and use of cannabis. Just last year, the government registered our disappointment at the United Nations that Marijuana was classified as a less harmful drug.

**8. What kind of self-help can a porn addict take?**

A person with porn addiction may want to try taking steps to limit the type, duration and frequency of porn first. It may be worthwhile to seek help from online counselling if the stigma is holding a person back from getting help face-to-face.

**9. How is alcohol addictive?**

Alcohol can be addictive because of the way it acts on the brain. The chemical it works on in the brain can cause a person to feel relaxed, calm and wellness. This drives a pathway to reinforce the behaviour as the body deems this as a positive and welcomed effect.

**10. How long would the recovery journey of a drug addict take if he/she seeks help voluntarily, and what happens if he/she relapses while seeking help?**

Some patients require years of help, others less. It is individual specific. It is not uncommon for patients to relapse while getting help. IMH will continue to provide encouragement, support and treatment for this. However, for drug use, if Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) becomes involved in their case, there is also the need for the individual to accept the legal consequences during their recovery journey.

**11. Are the Singapore authorities outlawing excessive gaming for students, similar to China?**

Currently the authorities are not outlawing excessive gaming for students. However, we are trying to increase awareness on this and improve our treatment and outreach for this increasing trend.

**12. Can an alcoholic experience visual hallucination?**

Yes, an alcoholic may experience visual hallucinations (and sometimes other forms of hallucinations) while intoxicated or during withdrawal.

**13. Is marijuana as harmful as drugs such as meth, or could it be at the same level as alcohol?**

It is difficult to compare which drug is more harmful, whether it is alcohol, marijuana, heroin etc. It depends on the severity of the drug/alcohol use, the dysfunction that the user suffers from in his day-to-day living, and the health consequences of the drug/alcohol. For example, someone with alcohol use disorder can develop severe health consequences such as bleeding gastric ulcers, liver cirrhosis and even dementia related to the alcohol use.

**14. How do we tell the difference between an alcoholic from a normal heavy drinker?**

When diagnosing someone as suffering from an alcohol use disorder, the patient does need to fulfil certain diagnostic criteria. We also need to assess the level of dysfunction in the person's life.

**15. Can responsible gamblers develop problem gambling?**

Yes, in fact, many of the patients we see started out as "responsible gamblers". But they started developing "symptoms" such as chasing their losses, hiding the losses from their loved ones, developing anxiety and depressive symptoms related to their gambling behaviours over time.

**16. For families who are struggling with getting a loved one to seek help for their addiction, what can they do?**

The first thing they could do would be to learn as much they could about addictions. It is hard to help someone if you don't understand it yourself; and addiction is a topic with many misconceptions. Families can also join support groups, seek counselling, or read online forums to understand addictions better, and how to get people to seek help.

**17. What can we do if a computer addict turns violent towards their loved ones?**

If there are risk issues (risk of self or others), IMH Mobile Crisis Team can come down to assess our patients. Some community partners do provide home visits as well. If the risks are significantly high, the police may sometimes need to be involved.

**18. Can computer addicts be admitted into IMH for inpatient treatment?**

IMH does not provide inpatient services for computer addiction. However, if there is an ongoing depression, suicide risk or aggression risk, sometimes patients with computer addiction may get admitted.

**19. If parents face difficulties in getting their school-going children to seek help, can they approach the school to arrange for counselling?**

Yes, it's a great way to get initial help and assessment through the school as they may then flag the case to a specialist via REACH.