

Alcohol and Drug Treatment

The treatment of alcohol and drug abuse has evolved and improved over the past few decades. Historically the usual approach was referral to a 28 day inpatient or residential program. Today there is an array of treatment settings that allow patients to integrate their treatment into their lives as they are ready.

The following are the types of treatment available to support the patient in their recovery:

Detoxification: Alcohol and some drugs can cause a physical dependency and withdrawal symptoms. Some alcohol and drug dependent people can undergo safe detoxification in an outpatient program. The need for admission to inpatient status for detoxification depends upon the amount of alcohol and/or the type of drug being used, the length and severity of the use and the current physical and mental condition of the person. Medical risk factors from a patient's other illnesses are also considered.

Rehabilitation (Inpatient and Residential): These chemical dependency programs are offered in General Medical Hospitals, Psychiatric Hospitals, and Alcohol and Drug Treatment Facilities. Patients receive 24 hour supervision with management of medical and psychiatric conditions while working on their recovery from addiction. Once the person is stable they can generally move to outpatient care for their ongoing treatment.

Partial Hospital Treatment: These programs provide 4 – 8 hours of programming during the day and allow the patients to go home at night. Usually an evening self-help group (like AA or NA) may be an adjunct to the program. The advantage of these programs is that the patient can be in a supportive environment while experiencing some of their stressors or triggers.

Intensive Outpatient Treatment: These programs meet for several hours at a time, often in the evenings. They may meet from 3 – 5 times per week. Self-help group participation is usually expected. As with the partial hospital programs, patients can experience their usual stressors and triggers while having ongoing support. Another important advantage is that patients can return to work while attending the program in the evenings.

Continuing Care: Treatment programs in Aetna's network offer Continuing Care support. Typically these support or "alumni" groups meet weekly. Sometimes former patients organize their own social events to celebrate and strengthen recovery. Some people benefit from seeing an individual therapist after completing a treatment program.

Treatment of alcohol and drug abuse is a process that occurs over time. A person's need for each particular type of treatment is determined by their individual condition, not by pre-determined program duration like "28 days", etc. The best results occur when the patient stays affiliated with a professional treatment program in their own community and/or participates in a self-help group.

Addiction is a disease that requires ongoing support to avoid relapse. If a person does relapse, it is important to consult an addictions specialist right away to help the person reestablish their recovery. Relapse is not a personal or treatment failure, and relapse does not require starting over from the beginning. The most important thing is to get help quickly.

The following are suggested considerations when choosing a program for your loved one:

1. Local programs are often more effective than treatment that is far away. If a person is treated locally, they can begin building their sober support network while in treatment. The family and significant others can be involved in the patient's care.
2. If the program is residential, then outpatient options like partial hospitalization or intensive outpatient programming may be offered so that the patient can gradually assume full responsibility for their life while still getting some treatment support.
3. The program should protect patients from exposure to drugs while in treatment by close monitoring and drug screening.

4. The family should be offered multiple ways to learn about addiction and to strengthen their own skills for helping someone with addiction.

5. The program should offer medications, on an individual basis, which assist people to achieve and maintain sobriety. These medications include Campral, Vivitrol, Subutex, Antabuse, and others. Please ask your physician about these medications.

6. Psychiatric evaluation and treatment should be available for patients with symptoms of mental disorders such as severe depression, major mood fluctuations, high anxiety, or a family history of mental illness.

7. Distant programs should be able to name the local persons and programs that will provide continued support once the patient returns home from treatment.

Aetna's network programs have been carefully screened for quality of care, adherence to modern principles of treatment, and excellent follow-up. Programs that are not in Aetna's network can be more costly and have not been screened for treatment that is consistent with current standards of practice.