

New Category of "Alcohol Use Disorder" May Not Improve Alcoholism Diagnosis



The soon-to-be-released update of psychiatry's diagnostic manual, DSM-5, combines problem drinking and alcoholism into a single condition known as "alcohol use disorder."

A new study suggests these changes may not improve the diagnosis of alcoholism, Time.com reports.

The updated DSM is scheduled to be released in May. Researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University studied more than 7,000 fraternal and identical twins, who answered questions about their drinking habits, to see if the new diagnostic definition would change diagnoses, compared with the current definition.

They found the changes are unlikely to result in a less accurate diagnosis, but they do not represent a clear improvement above the current diagnostic criteria, researcher Alexis Edwards, PhD, said in a news release. The current DSM includes "alcohol abuse," which applies to people with short-term and less severe problems, such as college students who binge drink, and "alcohol dependence," which has become synonymous with alcoholism, the article notes. "(I)t is not clear that the proposed diagnostic changes will result in a more accurate diagnosis," the study's authors write in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*. "(A)t best, one group of low severity cases will be replaced by another; at worst a group of individuals who exhibit more severe problems will be excluded from the DSM-5 diagnosis, while less severely affected individuals will meet diagnostic criteria."

Some experts are concerned that people who binge drink in their late teens and early adulthood could be seen as mild alcoholics.

According to Time.com, about 40 percent of college students engage in binge drinking frequently enough that they might qualify for the new diagnosis, but only 5 percent of graduates over 26 are current alcoholics.

Dr. Allen Frances, who chaired the task force that wrote the earlier edition of the DSM, said, "The

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DSM-5 decision to lump beginning drinkers with end-stage alcoholics was driven by researchers who are not sensitive to how the label would play out in young people's lives."

[Click here](#) to read NCADD's panel of experts column titled "Addiction Medicine" where the new DSM-V is discussed.