

Alcohol Treatments: Not One-Size-Fits-All



Not all treatments for alcoholism work for everyone who needs them, experts tell The New York Times. There are a few drugs that have shown promise in treating alcoholism when used with therapy. The challenge is to determine which treatments will benefit which patients.

"Just as breast cancer isn't just one type of breast cancer, alcoholism is heterogeneous as a disorder, so there's clearly not one drug that is going to work for everybody," Dr. Nora D. Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, told the newspaper.

Some addiction experts say as soon as a decade from now, the approach for treating alcoholism may be similar to that of treating depression. There will be a range of medication to choose from, coupled with therapy and other treatments.

Three drugs have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for treating alcoholism. Naltrexone and acamprosate reduce cravings to drink, while disulfiram makes patients sick if they drink.

Studies have shown both naltrexone and acamprosate work well for about one in seven people, and have almost no effect on the others. The antispasm drug Baclofen is sometimes prescribed for alcoholism, but results of studies on the drug are mixed, the article notes. Other drugs that have been tested include the anti-nausea drug ondansetron and the epilepsy drug gabapentin.

Alcoholics Anonymous and the Betty Ford Center emphasize abstinence instead of medication for alcoholism, the article states. "When you medicalize the disease and pay a lot of attention to the biology, it's easy to get a patient to say, 'Well, my cravings are gone, there's nothing else I have to do,'" said Dr. Harry L. Haroutunian, Physician Director at the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage, California. "We try to use the principles of the 12-step program as a source of strength during times of craving, to deal with the inevitable stressors. We want patients firmly involved with that."