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Addiction Experts Push for More Medical Approaches to Treatment

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Addiction experts are advocating for a more medical approach to addiction treatment, instead of relying on 12-step programs, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

In 2011, the American Society of Addiction Medicine, the largest professional society of doctors dedicated to treating and preventing addiction, released a new definition of addiction, calling it a chronic brain disorder, not just a behavior problem.

Last summer, the first group of medical residents started training in 10 newly accredited addiction medicine residencies around the country. In addition, more drugs to treat addiction are being studied, the article notes.

Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, recently said in a speech that addiction "is not a moral failing on the part of the individual. It's a chronic disease of the brain that can be treated."

Only about one in 10 people who need treatment for addiction to drugs or alcohol receive it, according to a report released recently. Many who do receive treatment do not receive evidence-based care, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. The report noted that sold evidence is lacking on the effectiveness of 12-step programs.

"Drug abuse treatment developed outside mainstream medicine," said Dr. Walter Ling, an addiction specialist at UCLA, told the newspaper. "We're still suffering from that."

Scientific research shows that addiction is a medical problem that affects the brain, according to the article.

National Institute on Drug Abuse Chief Dr. Nora Volkow says new medicines to treat addiction will encourage doctors to treat their patients' substance abuse problems, treating it as they would other chronic illnesses such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

"You are killing two birds with one stone — giving tools to improve outcomes for the patient and giving tools to the physician, increasing the likelihood they will incorporate substance abuse disorders into their practice," she said.