

Common Terminology and Definitions in Substance Abuse

Addiction: A chronic, relapsing disease characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite serious adverse consequences, and by long-lasting changes in the brain.

Barbiturate: A type of CNS depressant prescribed to promote sleep (usually in surgical procedures) or as an anticonvulsant.

Benzodiazepine: A type of CNS depressant prescribed to relieve anxiety and sleep problems. Valium and Xanax are among the most widely prescribed medications.

Buprenorphine: A mixed opiate agonist/antagonist medication approved by the FDA in October 2002 for the treatment of opioid addiction (e.g., heroin). Also known as Suboxone.

Central Nervous System (CNS): The brain and spinal cord.

CNS Depressants: A class of drugs that slow CNS function (also called sedatives and tranquilizers), some of which are used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders; includes barbiturates and benzodiazepines.

Comorbidity/Co-occurring Disorders (COD)/Dual Diagnosis: The occurrence of two disorders or illnesses in the same person, also referred to as co-occurring conditions or dual diagnosis. Patients with comorbid illnesses may experience a more severe illness course and require treatment for each or all conditions.

Detoxification: A process in which the body rids itself of a drug (or its metabolites). During this period, withdrawal symptoms

can emerge that may require medical treatment. This is often the first step in drug abuse treatment.

Methadone: A long-acting synthetic opioid medication that is used in treating opioid addiction and pain.

Opioid: A compound or drug that binds to receptors in the brain involved in the control of pain and other functions (e.g., morphine, heroin, hydrocodone, oxycodone).

Physical Dependence: An adaptive physiological state that occurs with regular drug use and results in a withdrawal syndrome when drug use is stopped; often occurs with tolerance. Physical dependence can happen with chronic—even appropriate—use of many medications, and by itself does not constitute addiction.

Polysubstance abuse: The abuse of two or more drugs at the same time, such as CNS depressants and alcohol.

Prescription Drug Abuse: The use of a medication without a prescription; in a way other than as prescribed; or for the experience or feeling elicited. Also known as "nonmedical" use.

Sedatives: Drugs that suppress anxiety and promote sleep; this includes benzodiazepines, barbiturates, and other types of CNS depressants.

Stimulants: A class of drugs that enhances the activity of monoamines (such as dopamine) in the brain, increasing arousal, heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration, and decreasing appetite; includes some



medications used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (e.g., methylphenidate and amphetamines), as well as cocaine and methamphetamine.

Tolerance: A condition in which higher doses of a drug are required to produce the same effect achieved during initial use; often associated with physical dependence.

Tranquilizers: Drugs prescribed to promote sleep or reduce anxiety; includes benzodiazepines, barbiturates, and other types of CNS depressants.

Withdrawal: Symptoms that occur after chronic use of a drug is reduced abruptly or stopped.

Frequently Used Acronyms

Health and Human Services (**HHS**)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration (**SAMHSA**)

Department of Public Health (**DPH**)

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services
(**BSAS**)

Massachusetts Technical Assistance
Partnership for Prevention (**MassTAPP**)

