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Alcoholic Symptoms Follow Set Pattern Of Progress

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fifth in a series of articles in which Carl H. Zwirn, Seasholm high school science instructor, reports his findings on problems involving beverage alcohol. He is a member of the Michigan committee on alcohol education, and recently returned from the Yale summer school of alcohol studies.

by CARL H. ZWIRN
Member State Alcohol Education Committee

Alcoholism is an illness afflicting between five and ten million men and women in the United States. Most alcoholics are not skid-row characters, but successful married people who started out as social drinkers, taking their liquor in moderation from three to ten years. Their drinking usually began in their teens, but most social drinkers do not become alcoholics.

A problem drinker is a person whose excessive drinking repeatedly interferes with his health or personal relations, and whose work is thereby reduced in efficiency and dependability. Alcoholism can be treated, but first it must be identified.

BECAUSE this illness is one of the four most serious to American public health, the progressive symptoms of alcoholism are given below:

- 1) **GROSS DRINKING BEHAVIOR.** Rather early in his drinking experience, he discovers the pampering effects of alcohol. The definite pattern leading to alcoholism begins when drinking is no longer social but psychological—a release from tension and inhibition. He begins to drink more heavily and more often than his friends, getting drunk more or less regularly.
- 2) **BLACKOUTS.** He frequently forgets what happened "the night before." These blackouts are the result of passing out, but a sort of amnesia.
- 3) **GULPING AND SNEAKING DRINKS.** He becomes gradually more and more dependent on alcohol. He changes from sipping drinks to "looting them off." He sneaks extra drinks, or has a couple before the party. He feels guilty and avoids talking about drinking.
- 4) **CHRONIC HANGOVER.** The "morning after" becomes increasingly painful and more frequent. This is the final danger signal. Alcoholism is now a chronic illness.
- 5) **LOSS OF CONTROL.** This is the mark of the alcoholic. Until now the problem drinker has been drinking heavily but not always consciously. More important, he has been able to stop drinking when he chooses. When he cannot stop drinking once he starts, he is an alcoholic. A single drink is likely to trigger a chain reaction and he will drink himself to complete intoxication. Those who are able to stop when they wish are not alcoholics.
- 6) **ALIBI SYSTEM.** He builds up excuses for his behavior because of his guilt feelings. He is defensive about his lack of control and gives excuses which are a tissue of lies, designed mostly to reassure himself.
- 7) **EYE OPENERS.** He needs drink in the morning to "start the day right." He cannot face the day without it. He begins drinking alone as part of the covering up process about this time.
- 8) **CHANGING THE PATTERN.** Under pressure from his family or employer he tries to break the hold alcohol has on him. He may change his drinks or his time for drinking, or even go "on the wagon" for a period, but one touch of alcohol starts the chain reaction again.
- 9) **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR.** He drinks alone, or with other alcoholics. He broods over imagined wrongs, is highly critical of others and may become destructive or violent.
- 10) **LOSS OF FRIENDS AND JOBS.** His anti-social behavior leads to alienation of old friends and family and to trouble on the job.
- 11) **SEEKING MEDICAL AID.** The mental anguish and the severe physical toll of uncontrolled drinking causes him to begin making the rounds of hospitals, doctors, and psychiatrists. He frantically seeks relief, but makes his condition and seldom receives any lasting benefits from these medical contacts, simply because he refuses to cooperate. He will not admit the extent of his drinking.
- 12) **END STAGE ALCOHOLISM.** Late-stage alcoholism. Until he reached this point, he had a choice: to drink or not to drink, although once he began he had no control of his drinking. Benders mark the beginning of the final, or chronic, phase. For days or sometimes weeks at a time there is uncontrolled and fanatical drinking, with one end in view—to get blindly and helplessly drunk. He drinks in a futile effort to escape the prob-

lems caused by his drinking. He ignores his family, friends, job, and even food and shelter.

13) **TREMORS.** He develops the "shakes," a serious nervous condition. He has the 17%, vitamin deficiency and other health problems. He swears off, but can't stay away from alcohol for long.

14) **PROTECTING THE SUPPLY.** He hides bottles to assure a supply for the future.

15) **UNREASONABLE RESENTMENTS.** He shows hostility, irritability, and resentment toward others. He accuses others to protect his supply and to punish himself subconsciously. He is moody and "flies into rages."

16) **NAMELESS FEARS.** He is constantly afraid of something he cannot pin down or even put into words. He has nameless anxieties and feelings of frustration, tension, and inability to face life. Without alcohol, he is nervous and shaky.

17) **COLLAPSE OF THE ALIBI SYSTEM.** He admits to himself that he is licked. This may have happened earlier, and will be repeated many times.

18) **SURRENDER.** If he is to recover, he must give up the idea that he can ever drink any amount of any alcoholic beverage again. He must be willing to seek and accept help. Unless this surrender process occurs with the collapse of the alibi system at the same time, there is no hope of recovery. With total abstinence, recovery is possible if help is obtained from Alcoholics Anonymous, doctors, psychiatrists, hospitals, or clinics which are able to help alcoholics.

There are several A.A. groups in the Birmingham area, and there are doctors, clergymen, and others who understand alcoholism and can help just as stigma was once attached to tuberculosis and other diseases, the stigma most people still associate with alcoholism keeps most of those who need treatment from becoming known to people and agencies who can help them. This stigma makes the surrender process more difficult, and unfortunately adds years of torture and perhaps death to the problems of the alcoholic.

Al-Anon Family Groups meet in the Birmingham area and throughout the country. Information may be obtained by writing to the Al-Anon Family Group headquarters, P. O. Box 182, Madison Square Station, New York 10, N. Y., or by calling A. A.

Three Alateans groups meet not far from Birmingham. Teen-age children of alcoholics have serious social and personal problems which can be helped by Alateans or others who understand the problems and can give aid.

Extensive literature is available; much accurate information may be found in local public libraries. Several periodicals on alcoholism are available.

I would be glad to assist anyone interested in alcoholism obtain the information he or she wants. I may be reached at 904 Packard street, Ann Arbor, or through Seasholm high school, Birmingham.

State Gets \$53 Million In Beer Taxes

Consumption of 5,060,694 barrels of beer and ale in the State of Michigan during 1958 enriched federal and Michigan's tax treasuries by \$53,716,246, the newly issued Brewers Almanac discloses.

Federal excise taxes on the quantity of beer and ale consumed in Michigan last year amounted to \$45,546,246. Michigan state collections of various forms of tax on distribution and sale of beer and ale totaled \$8,170,000.

THE ALMANAC, a compilation of facts and figures about the brewing industry, is published annually by the United States Brewers Foundation. Members of the 97-year-old foundation, the oldest incorporated trade association in the country, produce 85 per cent of the nation's beer and ale.

Average consumption of beer per person in Michigan was 19.9 gallons, third in per capita consumption among the states. Wisconsin remained in the number one position with a per capita consumption of 24.5 gallons, followed by Nevada with 23.5 gallons.

Michigan breweries produced 4,049,728 barrels of malt beverages last year. To rank the state eighth among beer producing states. In 1957, production was 4,368,401 barrels, putting the state in seventh place for that year.

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