

## Russell Ferstandig Addresses Addiction Treatment

*Russell Ferstandig examines the components of comprehensive treatment for addiction and how they can aid in recovery.*

# Russell Ferstandig | How Comprehensive Treatment Fights Addiction

Psychiatrist Russell Ferstandig recognizes that overcoming addiction is a complex process. Since the word “addiction” is used in many different ways by different people it is important that the reader understand what Dr. Ferstandig means when he uses the word “addiction”. According to Dr. Russ, as his patients call him, “the simplest definition of addiction is the official definition offered by the American Society Of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)”:

Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.

Although there are many aspects involved in effective addiction treatment, one of the biggest obstacles is overcoming the addicted individual’s repeatedly engaging in behaviors that are counter-productive to their well-being. This self-destructive behavior occurs because part of the addictive process is lying to ones self so that individual can justify their damaging and painful behaviors.

There is no single method to treat all cases of substance abuse. Each case is different and each person is different as well. That is why comprehensive care is necessary. It should address all aspects of the condition including the person’s physical, mental, and emotional health.

### *Recognizing Addiction*

The first step to getting treatment is for the individual to recognize and truly admit that there is a serious and progressively worsening problem that could be life threatening. Drugs and alcohol have the ability to impact all aspects of a person’s life. They may notice that their

performance at school or work is slipping or that their use is causing personal relationships to suffer. Eventually they realize that their day revolves around fulfilling their cravings or need to use to the point that their addiction becomes a “full-time job”. This almost always causes them to lose interest in things they once enjoyed. They also notice that when they are stressed or facing other challenges they progressively turn to drink or use drugs as a way to cope.

These are just a few of the signs and symptoms of active addiction. The person may also suffer from physical effects as well. Whether a person decides on their own to seek help or is guided by friends and loved ones, professional treatment can help them to regain control of their life. Typically, unless treatment of the addiction occurs the problems become progressively worse with the worst scenario being death, by overdose, accident, engaging in dangerous activities or chronic terminal medical problems.

### *Common Elements of Comprehensive Treatment*

Once a person decides to seek help, there are many treatment options available. Some people opt for inpatient treatment, while others do well as outpatients. It depends on their individual situation and what is determined most beneficial for their recovery. Finding a comprehensive program that will address all aspects of the problem can help support more effective and lasting recovery. Common elements of treatment include:

**Detoxification.** In order to recover from an addiction it is essential to stop using the addictive substance. The person must then rid their body of this substance and start off fresh. Some people worry about the effects of withdrawal when they stop using. When under the watchful eye of trained medical professionals, patients can safely detox their body. They are sometimes given medication to ease the early symptoms of withdrawal and reduce initial cravings. This can make the process go more smoothly.

**Behavior Therapy.** Behavior therapy is primarily focused on changing behaviors, with relatively little concern for what causes the behaviors. This type of therapy helps patients to change their negative behaviors and replace them with more positive ones. They learn to engage in activities that are more beneficial to their overall wellbeing. It helps them to recognize the impact of their actions on how they are feeling and those around them. After monitoring their behavior, they begin to implement new activities and skills. As positive changes take place, they are rewarded for reinforcement. The therapist and patient work together to develop an effective and lasting plan.

**Psychotherapy.** Also known as talk therapy, psychotherapy helps patients to identify and overcome their problems, with an emphasis on the causes of their problems. Cognitive-behavioral therapy helps patients to change their thinking patterns to reduce negative thoughts and behaviors. They learn more effective ways to cope with stress and temptation that do not

involve drugs or alcohol. Patients often undergo individual sessions as well as group or family sessions. When combined with behavioral therapy, psychotherapy can greatly accelerate the rate at which an individual learns new behaviors.

**Medication.** During the recovery process medication is sometimes used to help curb cravings or treat other psychiatric conditions, especially anxiety and depression. This can make recovery a more manageable process because the person is able to better focus on their goals and less on their symptoms. For opiate addiction, clearly the best medication to control the unavoidable withdrawal symptoms is Suboxone®. When used properly, it can 100% eliminate opiate withdrawal symptoms and enable an individual function like the person they were prior to their opiate use.

Some programs also include education and training regarding nutrition, exercise, meditation, and other beneficial activities. This can help the person to improve their physical health as well as their mental health.

## **Russell Ferstandig Highlights Ongoing Care Needs**

“Recovery does not stop once the person completes a formal treatment program,” says Dr. Russ. “It is an ongoing process. They must make the conscious decision each day to live their life substance-free and deal with life in a realistic and grounded manner. Minor relapses do not equate to failure, however. It just means that they need to adjust their approach until the relapses cease. Ongoing support is necessary for successful recovery.”

### **Join a Support Group**

Support groups are a beneficial resource for recovering addicts. It is important to realize that others have gone through the same problems, survived and become happier and more productive individuals. It is also important for an individual to see the same type of problem in another person, because it is easier to be honest about the cause-effect consequences in a similar situation involving someone else because there is much less distorting defensiveness than there is when the problem is personal. Through sharing their stories participants gain confidence and additional strategies for their ongoing recovery. They can seek advice while also providing support to others.

### **Family Support**

When returning home it is important to have support from family and friends. They can help the person to transition back to a more normal lifestyle and establish healthier routines. These are things that they will have learned during therapy and treatment, but family can help them to better implement these changes. It is also important that families recognize the need to keep a drug and alcohol free environment. This helps to reduce temptation.

### **Embrace Change.**

It is important for the patient to embrace positive changes in their lives. They should continue to try new things and get involved in activities that keep them busy and fulfilled. Engaging in daily exercise, finding meaningful work, and building a strong network of friends and family can support recovery efforts. The person must work to avoid falling back into the routines they had before treatment.

By addressing all aspects of addiction and engaging in a comprehensive treatment program addicts can learn to live a healthy, substance-free life.

### **ABOUT:**

*Dr. Ferstandig has more than three decades of experience in psychiatry and has focused much of his work on addiction treatment. He has earned board certification from the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, the American Society of Addiction Medicine, and the American Board of Addiction Medicine. Russell Ferstandig runs his own private practice as well as serving as the medical director and owner of Monmouth Behavioral Medicine Center.*

### **SOURCES:**

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