

Online registry seeks strategies to beat addiction

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RICHMOND, Va. — RICHMOND, Va. (AP) - For more than 20 years, Bob Reese was a self-described high-functioning drunk while working as head athletic trainer for the New York Jets. He realized that had to end when he began suffering blackouts even after moderate drinking.

He switched from his beloved Scotch to bourbon in hopes of cutting back, told himself another drink would kill him, and finally turned to rehab and Alcoholics Anonymous. Reese has been sober since 1991 and now he's sharing his success story on a national registry intended to collect and share the experiences of "recovery heroes."

"It goes beyond sobriety to really have a wonderful life, and that's what I want to share with others in recovery," Reese said.

Those such as Reese who have turned around their addictions to alcohol, drugs and other abusive behavior for at least one year are being asked to share their strategies with researchers as part of the National Quit & Recovery Registry. Using social media and other tools, the registry is gathering the lessons of people who have quit tobacco or have been in recovery for addictions that also include gambling, overeating and excessive sexual activity.

It started in October by the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute in Roanoke.

Warren Bickel, director of the Advanced Recovery Research Center at the institute, said the first-of-its-kind registry will shine a light on the recovery process through the unique experiences of those who have shed their addictions.

"People who have been in recovery for years or for a substantial period of time, they probably have specific things they do that help maintain it, and no one's catalogued that," Bickel said. "We could share that information with people struggling with different addictions or even with the treatment community."

Besides researchers, the registry's collection of strategies is accessible online to anyone attempting to break the bonds of their addictions.

Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said the registry represents a new tack in dealing with addiction.

"Most of the research that has been done up to now has focused on that immediate intervention that would allow a person to stop taking drugs," she said. "Much less is

known about recovery."

The stories will be solicited from social media sites such as Facebook that relate to recovery and shared on the registry's Web page. Alcoholics Anonymous has a Facebook page, and Bickel said there are an "amazing" number of other recovery sites to draw from.

Some in recovery may be asked to volunteer for more detailed studies at Carilion Research. The people behind the stories remain anonymous.

"We're inviting people to come and participate in any way they'd like to," said Bickel, who has studied addictions for nearly 30 years. "Given the enormity of the problem, we're hoping this database will become a national resource for researchers."

They only want recovery stories from those who have been clean for at least a year because many people fighting addiction relapse quickly.

"We figure if they have a year or more under their belt, well, then they've learned some techniques they are able to bring to bear to sustain their recovery," he said. "We'd like to know about those."

A typical challenge for a recovering alcoholic, for instance, is the holidays when beer, wine and spirits are in abundance.

Besides its human toll, addiction in has a huge price tag. Substance abuse costs the United States more than \$600 billion annually, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The costs include health care and lost productivity, among other expenses.

For Reese, a two-month stay in rehab and the full Alcoholics Anonymous regimen - 90 meetings in 90 days - put him on the road to recovery. Over the years, he has studied stress management, hypnosis and advanced his education into addiction.

Reese said he accepts the fact that he will never drink gain.

"I created a mental picture for myself that if I took a drink, it would be poison, it would just kill me," he said.

He now teaches psychology at Jefferson College of Health Sciences and is part of Bickel's team.

Thomas McLellan, former deputy director of the office of National Drug Control Policy in the Obama administration, said addictions are chronic illnesses that require a lifetime of attention.

"They have not been treated that way," he said. "They've been treated like bad habits or low morals or poor character," he said.

"The idea was to get the toxins out of your body and then you should have learned your lesson, you should have learned some insight," McLellan added. "They're not recovered, they're recovering."

Janelle Wesloh, executive director of recovery management at Hazelden, a nonprofit alcohol and drug addiction treatment center based in Minnesota, described the registry as "another tool to increase the hope of recovery as we work to decrease the stigma of this disease."

"Putting a face on recovery and creating an opportunity for the sharing of recovery success stories is a key factor in this mission," Wesloh wrote in an email.

"Recovery does not happen in 28 days at a treatment center," she wrote. "It's an ongoing process, with the ultimate goal of lifelong sobriety."

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Online:

National Quit & Recovery Registry: <http://quitandrecovery.org>

National Quit & Recovery Registry Facebook page: [http://www.facebook.com/home.php\(hash\)!/QuitAndRecovery](http://www.facebook.com/home.php(hash)!/QuitAndRecovery)



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