

Summary from the March 23<sup>rd</sup> Teleconference on  
**“Youth dealing with both substance use and mental health issues- what works”**

Panelists: Jasmine (youth); Fiona (parent) & Dr. Shimi Kang (Director, Provincial Youth Concurrent Disorders Program)

Moderator: Y. Hing Tse, Manager, Kelty Resource Centre

Key points:

Jasmine who is currently a full time student and full time working is sharing her own journey.

**What kind of support is necessary and important?**

- I won't be around without my mom who strongly brings me for treatment. Then I went to the Provincial Concurrent Disorders Program. Then I realized it was my depression that kept me so down and my mom is the only one who keeps talking to me and never gives up showing her care to me. She is important for my recovery.

**What treatment seems to work for you when you need support in addressing both substance use and mental health issues?**

- I enjoy seeing my counselor and Dr. Kang, they are not the people that I see day to day, they would not tell my parents about my issue unless I give permission. It is great to have the opportunity to have such support. They always ask me “ what can we do for you?” I can call or talk to them if I need and there is always someone who is there for me. They not only listen to me and my concerns, they also educate me and provide me the understanding of the link of my depression to substance use which is very helpful for my case.

**What motivates you to seek help?**

- I really don't want to experience the feeling of walking in the cold from Burnaby to Richmond, I really don't want to get back there. I have a lot of things I want to accomplish. I am studying full time and I am working full time. I am much better and feeling way much better with treatment.

**What you will recommend to youth from your personal experience?**

- Keep sharing with friends about your worries and issues and how you feel, telling people will help to release some tensions. Identify a safe environment to partying or drinking

**Fiona, a parent of 10 children, who has a 15 yr old son struggling with psychiatric medication, What role you play in supporting your child?**

- Be a parent, take on a parent's role. When I figured out my son was exhibiting signs which was more than experimenting on drugs, he was losing his control and beyond, we were lucky to have a friend who is a physician and he told us to go and seek help. There we went to the concurrent disorders program. I think it is important for me to make sure my child is safe and I don't mind when they told me at a point that they don't like me for I am pushing them to go for treatment or setting some limits at home.

**What lessons you learn as a parent and what challenges you had faced and what sustains your effort and what is the most rewarding moment?**

- When I see my son is on his right track, gaining the self control and is functioning in a way that he is happy and enjoying life, it is rewarding. It is a life long challenge, do one thing at a time.
- The importance of being a parent rather than a friend, I don't mind if my son don't like me at times”

Dr. Shimi Kang, Director, Provincial Concurrent Disorders Program

#### How common it is for youth to have concurrent disorders?

- The earlier and younger you see your child is getting into substance use, the more likely a mental health issue is underlying
- 70% of Canadians drink alcohol but not everyone get into trouble. When the drinking is connected to negative consequences, it is an issue.
- In BC, the average age for drinking is as early as 12; the average age for marijuana is 13 and average age for stimulants is 15
- Substance use can progress from experimentation, to recreational use to regular /habitual use then to abuse and/or dependence. The abuse/dependence is the problem and characterized by negatives consequences and lack of control over the substance use.
- co-morbidity such as ADHD, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders are most common. Fetal alcohol syndrome, autism and eating disorders are also a big issue etc

#### How to address both issues at the same time?

- Very common that substance use issues can mask mental health issue such as memories of trauma and anxiety. Therefore, treatment needs to focus on building self esteem, building skills, providing support to address trauma, stress and anxiety and other mental health issues.
- Provide the youth with a **menu of choices** from harm reduction all the way to abstinence. To figure out and MATCH where they are at and at what stage of change they are at.
- More important is to engage the youth and especially in the first session is to get the youth agreed to come back, without engagement, a great diagnosis and treatment plan is of no use.

#### From your clinical work experience, what treatment seems working for youth and their family in supporting them to address both mental health and substance use issues?

1. Don't give up, there are times, they do very well and then relapse but they come back and it is a cycle, so don't give up
2. Attachment and engagement is critical
3. Meet youth where they are at, address their underlying needs, small change counts

#### Finally, what key things you will recommend to youth and family when they are struggling with the concurrent disorders?

Pay attention to all the healthy living tips:

- a. sleep hygiene as deprivation of sleep affects our mood significantly
- b. self care including exercise - cardio vascular exercise 3 times a week and 20 mins each time improve mild depression
- c. expose to outdoor sun light will enhance mood
- d. Pro social activity will help also

#### Additional Resources:

check out the Quick Reference Sheet on Concurrent Disorders

Kelty Resource Centre will be putting up a new website by the end of this year.

**The Downside of High** -A Documentary that tells the stories of three young people from British Columbia, who believe – along with their doctors – that their mental illness was triggered by marijuana use. <http://www.cbc.ca/video> Go to The Nature of Things and then click on the Downside of High.

Kelty Resource Centre is the provincial information centre for BC children, youth and families with mental health and substance use concerns.

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