

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ADDICTION

### ***Addiction is:***

✓ **Chronic**

A disorder that is CHRONIC continues for a long time. The opposite of chronic is “acute,” which means relatively sudden and short. “Acute” disorders are treated once and they’re gone. “Chronic” disorders are *managed*, not cured.

✓ **Primary**

A disorder that is PRIMARY means that it is not the “result” of something else. It is a disorder in its own right, requiring specific treatment.

For example, a man may start drinking to control the painful feelings of depression. However, when that man becomes an alcoholic (addicted to alcohol), he now has a separate and “primary” disorder that needs treatment.

Treating the depression does not mean the alcoholism will also go away.

✓ **Progressive**

A disorder that is PROGRESSIVE tends to get worse over time. With drug addiction, we see that the consequences of the addiction tend to worsen over time. One important mechanism of this progressive quality is tolerance. The development of tolerance tends to ensure that a person has to get more, spend more, hide more, and use more over time.

✓ **Incurable**

We say that addiction is INCURABLE because the biological changes involved in addiction tend to be permanent. As a result, an addict will never be able to safely use the drug of abuse (or any other drugs of abuse). An alcoholic will never be able to “drink normally.” Likewise, a cocaine addict will never be safe using stimulating drugs (for example, ephedra, which is an over-the-counter stimulant). A person addicted to one drug can easily switch over to another drug and still be an addict. This is called cross-addiction