

Substance Abuse In Medical Professionals

by Robert Alexander Center | Jul 17, 2022 | Blog | 0 comments



Although alcohol misuse is prevalent in many professions, few issues are as severe as alcoholism and medical professionals. There is a prevailing belief that healthcare workers are advocates for healthy lifestyles, and they tend to have better habits than the general population, including lower smoking rates and increased rates of exercise.

However, studies have shown that when it comes to alcohol and illicit drugs, the rates are certainly no lower than that of the general population and may well be higher in some situations. Read on to find out more about why medical professionals [may need treatment](#) for these issues.

Why Is Addiction A Problem For Healthcare Professionals?

Doctors, nurses, and paramedics save thousands of lives every day because they have made it their job to care for the health of others. But many people who work in the healthcare field have problems with drugs or alcohol. In particular, alcoholism among medical professionals is a common and dangerous combination.

Studies show that between 10 and 12 percent of healthcare workers, including at least 1 in 10 doctors and 1 in 5 nurses, will develop a problem with how they use drugs during their careers.

These numbers are higher than the numbers for the general population, but they are probably even higher because medical professionals are known for not reporting drug abuse disorders as often as they should. This is hugely problematic because it means medical professionals don't receive [the treatment they desperately need](#).

What Is The Reason?

When doctors or nurses are intoxicated or struggling with an alcohol addiction, it's clear that patients are at a much higher risk of getting hurt or being hurt in other ways because of their carelessness. Less clear is why so many doctors choose to ignore these risks.

Healthcare workers often have to work long shifts of 12 hours or more, which can drain them of all their energy and make alcohol seem like an easy way to feel better. Medical professionals may turn to alcohol for comfort when they are in high-stress situations like emergency situations or when they are emotionally worn out.

Medical staff who get to know their patients well may feel sad when they can't help them get better. This can be hard on people who work in the medical field, and they may drink to deal with it. Some doctors and nurses may also have mental disorders that aren't always obvious because they use drugs and the issues are therefore hidden or masked.

In addition to alcohol, medical personnel often use other mind-altering medications in their attempts to relieve stress and depression. Prescription medicines can be a source of recreational drug usage due to their easy accessibility. Stimulants and "relaxants" like benzodiazepines may be used to counteract the effects of exhaustion caused by long hours. Sadly, medical practitioners have a tendency to combine alcohol and other substances, which can be quite harmful, and it might be that an [intensive outpatient program is the best step for them to take](#).

The Risks

How dangerous it is for a medical professional to be an alcoholic depends on what kind of work they do. Surgeons, for example, need to do their jobs with few or no injuries, so their drinking is one of the most dangerous things they can do. Even so, one in six surgeons drinks too much. The quality of a surgeon's work can be affected by their use of alcohol, especially if they are drunk or going through withdrawal at work.

However, the truth is that any healthcare worker who has a dependence on drugs or alcohol will be a danger to their patients and will potentially put their colleagues' careers at risk, as well as their own.

What To Look Out For

Most of the time, doctors and nurses who drink too much are called "high-functioning alcoholics." This term is used to describe someone who drinks too much alcohol but still has a successful job or personal life.

Friends and families of high-functioning alcoholics often have a hard time figuring out what's wrong because the alcoholic is so good at hiding their condition. High-functioning alcoholics are also more likely to ignore that they have a problem for the same reasons. But there are signs that can be seen, such as:

- Many breaks or absences during a shift
- Alcohol on the breath
- Being late to work
- Slurred words
- Hidden bottles
- A lot of hangovers
- Mood swings or being irritable
- Wanting to be alone
- Poor hygiene
- Aggression or violent behavior

If you or a medical professional you care about shows these signs of alcoholism, please talk to a treatment provider about [rehab that includes detox](#). Abuse can be stopped by getting help, which can also save their career and the lives of their patients.

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The Robert Alexander Center for Recovery is a brand new, state-of-the-art addiction treatment center in Kentucky, offering evidence-based treatment for substance abuse.

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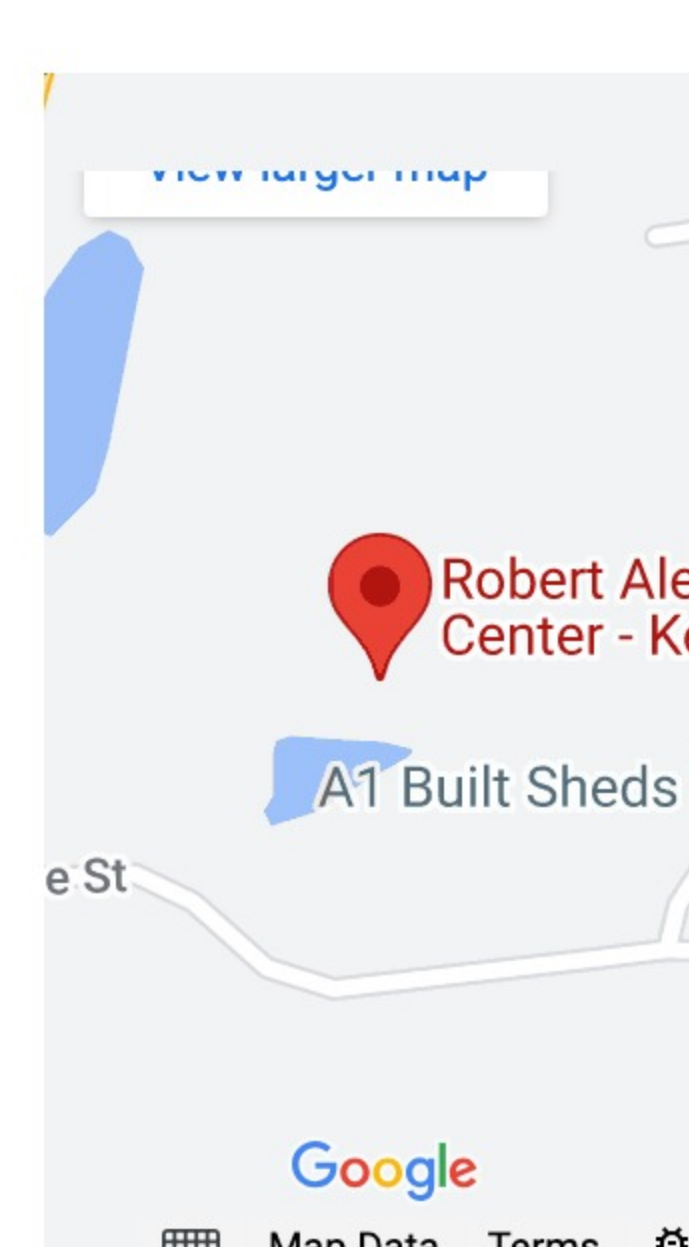
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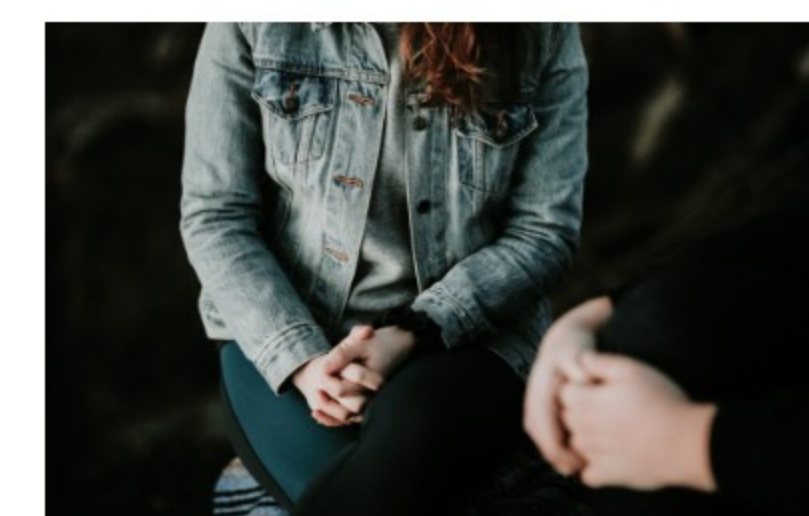
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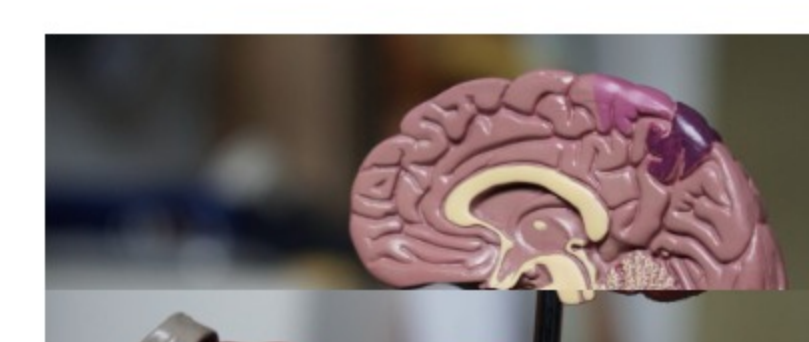
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