

As You See It, Treat It

Reflecting the glow of recovery from Starlight at Tamassee

By Jon Holland, CEO of Tamassee DAR School



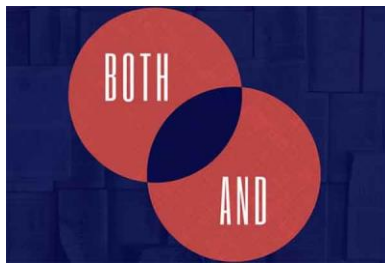
For many decades, addiction was primarily seen as a moral failing, and for many today, it still is. When you understand addiction through this lens, then you have a set of resources to address it – surrender to a Higher Power, a fearless moral inventory, amends making, service to your fellow humans, maintaining conscious contact with God, and the like. Without doubt, this approach to addiction has led countless thousands to freedom.

In recent years, new voices have arisen as research into addiction has grown. These voices see addiction as a disease of the brain. The human brain develops in certain ways due to genetics, traumatic experiences, and substance exposure, and the development inclines a person to addiction. From this perspective, addiction is like heart disease or diabetes. Genetic factors can predispose a person to either of those conditions. Environmental factors like stress and activity level play a role. Repeated exposure to certain foods impacts those diseases. Addiction-as-disease advocates encourage us to treat addiction like any other illness: utilize the best

medications from doctors, avail yourself of the best mental health therapies, and work patiently at treatment. This approach has led many more thousands to wholeness.



Sometimes the two approaches are pitted against one another, as if addiction is either a disease one can't help or moral choices one is thoroughly responsible for. In my experience, the dichotomy is unhelpful. It's simply not an either/or but a both/and reality. The scientific research has proven addiction is a disease of the brain, but the choices those with this disease make either lead them and their loved ones toward health or away from it. The path of wisdom understands addiction is a complex problem needing holistic services.



To illustrate, here's the definition of addiction from the American Society of Addiction Medicine: "a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences." Notice how succinctly this definition ties in the diseased nature of addiction but also the complex interactions the brain has with our environment (like trauma and moral choices) and life experiences (like trauma, emotions, relationships, etc.). When you understand addiction to be a multi-faceted challenge between genetics, trauma, brain wiring, harmful patterns of thinking and feeling, isolated relationships, destructive choices, and painful life consequences, you understand it takes a holistic approach to offer healing. In other words, as you see, so you'll treat it.

At Starlight at Tamasee, we offer a holistic approach in a therapeutic community to mothers in recovery and their children, so they can heal together and bond as a family. To learn more about Starlight, visit www.starlight.tdarschool.org, or contact us at starlight@tdarschool.org or 864-944-1390. If your church or civic group is interested in a presentation on recovery, contact Jon Holland at jholland@tdarschool.org.