**Introduction**

Recovery from addiction can be a long-term process. People who are dealing with substance abuse issues may need multiple episodes of treatment over a sustained period of time before they are able to abstain from drug use and be restored to full functionality (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). After treatment, recovery from addiction involves daily decisions to refrain from drug abuse.

**Detoxification**

For certain drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, the individual must go through a process of detoxification as the first stage of treatment (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). During detoxification, the individual goes through physical withdrawal symptoms as the drugs in his or her system are gradually eliminated (Butcher, Minkeka, & Hooley, 2007). Detoxification alone is rarely sufficient in allowing a person to recover fully from substance abuse issues and should be followed by a treatment plan that addresses the individual’s particular needs (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006).

**Components of Successful Drug Treatment Plans**

Even though there is no one-size-fits-all treatment plan for substance abuse, there are common elements that apply to successful treatment plans (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). The best programs tailor the plan to meet the needs of each patient. Treatment plans must address the issues of the individual on multiple levels, ranging from medications and counseling to family support, legal assistance, medical services, or financial services (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). Drug monitoring may be necessary during the treatment to make sure that the individual has not started using drugs again. Even after the formal treatment phase has concluded, the additional social support needs to be available to the individual so he or she does not relapse into substance abuse (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006).

**Health Issues**

Treatment plans need to take into account the range of health problems that the recovering addict may encounter in his or her lifetime. Substance abuse can have long-term effects on the brain and body that continue even after a successful conclusion of treatment (Levinthal, 2008). Addiction is sometimes
referred to as a brain disease because of the way drug use can create major changes in the structure and functions of the brain that persist long after the drug use has ceased (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). Depending upon the drug, there may also be damage to different systems in the body; for example, drugs such as cocaine or amphetamines may place a great deal of strain on the cardiovascular system through prolonged stimulation of heart rate and blood pressure (Levinthal, 2008).

**Preventing Relapse**

The immediate goals of substance abuse treatment are to improve the patient’s ability to function in society, reduce drug use, and address the medical and social consequences of the addiction (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006). The overall goal of treatment is to ensure that the person will not engage in substance abuse again over his or her lifetime. Relapse to substance abuse occurs at about the same rate as relapse for some chronic medical conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, or asthma (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006). Just like a person who is dealing with chronic medical conditions, a person who has a problem with substance abuse needs support in making long-term changes in behavior and lifestyle (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). Treatment plans must aim to place patients in healthy social environments that nurture the recovery process, create networks of social support, find employment, and assist them in activities that allow them to find meaning in their daily lives. People who have a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse disorder are particularly vulnerable to relapse, even after periods of full remission, and need to be monitored for their mental health issues in addition to the substance abuse treatment (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2006). Cognitive-behavioral therapies that focus on relapse prevention generally have the patients work to anticipate the problems that they will encounter in recovery and build on the skills necessary to cope with these problems (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000). Such treatment is often expensive and is often difficult for an individual to afford. A limited number of free or low-cost clinics exist in many communities for treatment and support, but waiting lists can be long. For this reason, many substance abuse advocacy groups stress the need for additional public funds to support community treatment clinics.

**References**

