

...about dependence and addiction

Dependence refers to a physical state of adaptation that results in a specific **withdrawal** syndrome on cessation of a drug. It can also manifest with rapid dose reductions, or administration of an antagonist. Dependence can occur with classes of drugs not associated with misuse (such as beta-blockers and antidepressants), and can be present in both addicted and non-addicted patients.

Tolerance is a state of adaptation that results in the reduction of one or more of the effects of a drug (desirable or undesirable); i.e. higher doses are required to produce equivalent effects. It can develop rapidly, or over an extended period. Tolerance can be pharmacological or behavioural (an individual may learn to compensate for an effect), and it may vary with time and setting; e.g. previously safe doses, taken in changed circumstances, may result in overdose.

Addiction is a syndrome relating to the use of a psychoactive drug or class of drugs that is characterised by a cluster of physiological, behavioural, and cognitive phenomena. Its development and manifestation can be influenced by genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors.

Diagnosis requires three of the following to be present together in a 12 month period:

- loss of control – the drug is used in greater quantities or for longer than intended;
- compulsion – use is increasingly important, absorbing significant time and energy;
- withdrawal;
- tolerance;
- persistent use, despite harm or negative consequences;
- neglect or postponement of alternative activities or interests;
- planned and unsuccessful attempts to cut down use.