

A CALL FOR COMPASSION AND CULTURE CHANGE FOR ADDICTED DOCTORS

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There is a code of silence regarding addicted doctors in medicine. While the doctor is minimizing or denying the problem, often her or his co-workers look the other way. Colleagues may be concerned but hold back from “denouncing” one of their own. Yet, ethical and legal issues are real. Patient care may be compromised.

This presentation will engage listeners by asking several reflective questions. The 4 C’s of addiction will be reviewed. Signs of addiction will be enumerated. Why doctors become entangled in substances will be examined. Is addiction different from burnout? If so, how? The adverse consequences of addiction will be reviewed. How can compassion be offered for a problem that triggers blame and shame?

Impaired doctors are usually referred to Physician Health Programs. What do they offer? Can the Buddhist view of addiction contribute to Western therapies? Addiction recovery will be examined through a mindfulness lens.

This, however, still puts the onus on the individual who struggles with addiction. What about the medical culture may contribute to the problem? Can this be changed? If so, how? Addicted doctors are not alone, and the problem is more than personal. Rather than simply review the literature, this presentation will engage the audience so that the taboo of addiction can be tackled. It is intended to break the silence such

that upon return to work, participants may notice a colleague who shows signs of addiction and then open their hearts to offer support.■