Gambling Addiction: Diagnosis and Treatment Fact Sheet

Definition and Diagnosis:

1. Gambling becomes disordered when it causes harmful consequences in a person's life.

2. An individual with a gambling disorder will continue to gamble despite negative outcomes and will experience intense urges and cravings.

3. The DSM-5 classifies gambling disorder as an addiction, under the substance-related and addictive disorders section.

Prevalence:

1. Lifetime prevalence is around 1%-2% of the general population.

2. 12-month prevalence varies between 0.1%-6%, depending on the region.

3. Gambling disorder's prevalence is similar to that of bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Risk Factors:

1. Genetic predispositions.

2. Consumption of certain medications, notably dopamine agonists (such as pramipexole and ropinirole) or partial dopamine agonists (such as aripiprazole).

3. Co-occurring psychiatric disorders: depression, bipolar disorder, ADHD, SUDs, antisocial personality disorder, and even dementia.

4. Psychological traits: high risk-taking, sensation-seeking, competitiveness, and aversion to losses.

5. Availability and access to gambling opportunities.

6. High prevalence of gambling in one's community or peer group.

7. Elevated gambling levels in certain communities, e.g., Asian-American communities, due to cultural integration and targeted marketing.

Screening Recommendations:

1. Screen all patients, preferably during intake, and revisit annually.

2. Initial questions could include spending habits on entertainment or past year gambling experiences.

3. Use structured tools like the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS) for more comprehensive screening.

Treatment Options:

1. **Medications:** While no FDA-approved medications specifically treat gambling disorder, some evidence supports the use of opioid antagonists like naltrexone and nalmefene, as well as n-acetylcysteine.

2. **Psychotherapy:** Several modalities are effective, including motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and supportive therapy.

3. **Online Resources:** Telehealth options, software like GamBan to block gambling websites, online portals, and self-help workbooks like those from the UCLA Gambling Program can aid treatment.

4. **Community Support:** Gamblers Anonymous, Gamblers in Recovery, and state-funded treatments offer communal support. GAMANON supports families of those with gambling disorders.

5. **Hotlines:** 1-800-GAMBLER provides advice and resources.

Clinical Tips:

1. Approach gambling disorders holistically, focusing on home, health, purpose, and community.

2. Encourage re-establishment of healthy practices, including sleep, nutrition, exercise, and stress management.

3. Utilize both medical and non-medical treatment options based on the individual patient's needs and characteristics.

4. Stay curious and nonjudgmental during patient interactions.

5. Explore the patient's relationship with money, their feelings about winning and losing, and reasons behind their continued gambling to understand their motivations.

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