

HEALTH AWARENESS

Problem Gambling Often Overlooked

(NAPS)—It's a good bet that when a problem gambler seeks treatment for other physical health or mental health problems he or she will be undiagnosed and untreated for the gambling problem.

"Our research shows that 2 to 3 percent of the U.S. population will have a gambling problem in any given year," said Keith Whyte, executive director for the National Council on Problem Gambling in Washington, D.C., "and many of these gamblers first go to their primary care providers complaining of stress-related problems such as migraines, insomnia, stomach ailments and even cardiac distress."

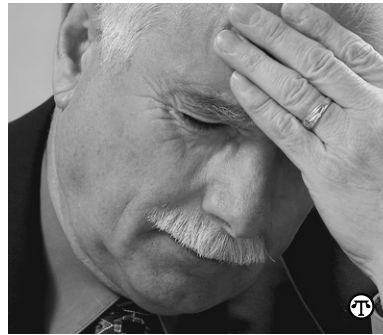
Whyte noted that few, if any, health care professionals routinely screen for problem gambling.

"Of the thousands of problem gamblers who receive medical intervention every year, few are ever diagnosed with the gambling disorder," Whyte said. "The doctors end up treating the physical symptoms and not the underlying mental disorder that caused the symptoms."

In fact, a study of gambling disorders published in the Archives of Family Medicine found that about 10 percent of all patients entering the primary health care setting met the criteria for problem gambling.

And the missed diagnoses don't only happen in primary health care.

Whyte said, "Several studies have placed gamblers at higher risk for depression, as well as alcohol and drug abuse. So the gam-



MISSED OR DISMISSED—Gamblers don't often talk freely about gambling unless asked directly.

bling addiction may go unscreened and untreated by the mental health care system as well."

Most intake forms for treatment ask details about a person's mental health history, including drug or alcohol use. They don't even list problem gambling anywhere on the form, and neither the doctors nor social workers nor counselors are trained to ask about it.

"They miss the gambling diagnosis because they don't ask," said Mia Moran-Cooper, executive director of the Problem Gamblers Help Network of West Virginia, who chairs this year's national Problem Gambling Awareness Week campaign.

"Most gambling addicts are in denial. They won't volunteer information about their gambling problem because they think they can quit at any time," said Moran-Cooper.

To learn more or to find more help, call toll free (800) 522-4700 or visit www.ncpgambling.org.

Note to the Editor: Although this article would be appropriate any time throughout the year, National Problem Gambling Awareness Week is March 5-11, 2007.

Did You Know?

It's a good bet that though gambling is considered a precipitating factor in a variety of health problems, when a problem gambler seeks treatment for a health problem he or she will be undiagnosed for the gambling problem. To learn more, visit www.npgaw.org or call toll free (800) 522-4700.

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